

*Abraham Kuypers: A Centennial Reader*

Edited by James D. Bratt

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 498 pp.

*Creating a Christian Worldview:*

*Abraham Kuypers's Lectures on Calvinism*

Peter S. Heslam

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 300 pp.

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For too long, the English-speaking world has been without easy access to the abundant corpus of Abraham Kuypers. Publishings spawned by this year's centennial commemorations of his Stone Lectures at Princeton, however, remedy that lacuna. Two outstanding volumes have been released in the past year that will end that theological drought.

Prior to 1980, besides Kuypers's devotional works (*To Be Near to God* and *The Work of the Holy Spirit*) and the massive *Principles of Sacred Theology*, only a few selections by Kuypers were widely available. Although Kuypers's 1898 *Lectures on Calvinism* were released earlier (1931), copies were often difficult to locate. The year 1991 saw the reissue of his *The Problem of Poverty*, formerly *Christianity and the Social Question*, and translations of selections on science and politics. Yet, prior to 1998, it would have been difficult to provide English-language texts for studies on Kuypers's own voluminous works—a corpus comprising 223 separate publishing entries exclusive of his newspaper editorials. With these two new books, classes on Kuypers's thought and Christian worldview now have adequate primary sourcing.

James Bratt and Peter Heslam have provided two very different books that work well in tandem. Bratt's volume contains primary resource material that has long been out of print or never before translated. He has reproduced representative samples from various periods of Kuypers's writings and also from a variety of disciplines. Bratt attempts to complement the Stone Lectures (which present the mature conclusions of "the statesman-like scholar") with documents from speeches, newspaper columns, sermons, party speeches, and other academic addresses to round out more of Kuypers's "nuances of thought, his pragmatic applications of principle, the

contexts of his thinking, the sources off which he drew," and so forth. He succeeds in providing the reader with a wide, overdue, and prudent cross-section of the Kuypers corpus.

Following a short introduction to the context and work of Abraham Kuypers, James Bratt collects primary source material under the following rubrics: *Beginnings* (a narrative of Kuypers's conversion and an early cultural critique), *Church and Theology* (including sermons against modernism and critiques of unorthodox theology of the day), *Politics and Society* (with essays on Calvinist political principles and a variety of political discourses), and *Culture and Education* (with an essay clarifying the dangers of evolutionary thought, an epistemology of common grace, and his 1880 inaugural address at the Free University on sphere sovereignty). These selections are well-chosen and representative; already one professor has told me that he had identified many of these as the most exemplary samples of the Kuypersian corpus—only heretofore he had to provide his own Dutch translations.

Especially intriguing for their thrust are Kuypers's early social critique ("Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life"), which shows a surprisingly Romantic side of Kuypers; his brilliant "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain" (which could serve as a prophylactic against the seduction of neolatry); "Common Grace" and "Common Grace in Science" (for Kuypers's own formulations of his distinctive contribution to neo-Reformed systemics); and "Evolution," which both skewers naturalism more than some would expect while also respecting organic development more than often anticipated.

Most enjoyable for those delivered from what Kuypers called "politicophobia" are the seminal political essays: "Maranatha" (the keynote at the formation of the Antirevolutionary Party); "Our Instinctive Life" (on the interface of human nature and practical politics); and the champion *pièce de résistance* "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties," a straightforward manifesto of the history and philosophy of Calvinistic political principles.

Regarding technical aspects of Bratt's volume, pictures grace the book well, the selected bibliography is worthwhile even if short, footnotes are insightful and reserved, and an index would have been helpful. Bratt supplies a brief, unobtrusive introduction to each selection, and occasional sidebars provide useful supplements. This should become the leading text for studies in Kuypersianism if the original voice is valued.

Peter Heslam's volume will fill in some of the gaps that Bratt's primary

sources cannot address. Heslam's book is an excellent analysis of Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*. It is indeed, as James Bratt assesses, the most comprehensive English treatment available. Heslam, an Anglican curate and Oxford scholar, has provided a fine *talmud* on Princeton's 1898 Stone Lectures. Heslam defends his choice of Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* as the best exposition of Kuyperian thought because: (1) it is a summary of Kuyper's thought; (2) it reflects his peak performance, occurring at the high point of his career; (3) occurring in a foreign context, it demanded that he enunciate his findings in universalistic rather than particularistic categories ("it is therefore of singular value ... to interpret Kuyper's ideas in a context wider than that of the Netherlands alone"); and (4) it had the greatest international influence. Heslam has selected the "manifesto of Kuyperian Calvinism" to exhibit "the most complete, cogent, and visionary expression of Kuyperian thought."

His intent of analyzing some of Kuyper's motivation is attained without stretching the textual fabric too thin. Among the other goals of Heslam's volume are: to explore "the way in which America and Calvinism were related in Kuyper's thought" (15); "to contextualize Kuyper's school of thought" (16) within its international setting; to compare Kuyper's thought with Calvin's (17); and to provide a sympathetic but realistic appraisal of Kuyper's life, work, and impact.

Heslam offers three preliminary chapters—the first is an elaboration of the historical importance of the Stone Lectures, the second includes a lively biography of Kuyper based on primary sources, along with pertinent discussions of religious and cultural factors at the time, and the third sets the Stone Lectures in the context of American evangelicalism and especially the Princeton tradition. Heslam's doctoral work that compares Kuyper and Warfield (also James Orr to some extent) is useful and illuminating at points.

Chapters 4-9 each discuss one of the six 1898 lectures. Each chapter provides summary, analysis, scholarly documentation, and perspective. The final chapter discusses the public and academic reception of the Stone Lectures, and contains Heslam's own concluding assessments. An excellent bibliography (complemented by the first chapter's review of the secondary literature) and index round out this book, which will certainly become a standard for classroom use and research.

Among the few points that might be disputed: Heslam may have slightly overstated Kuyper's inclination toward progressivity (e.g., p. 4, especially when compared with his *Fata Morgana* piece), and at times may reflect an

attempt to tailor an historical figure to modern contexts. The volume could be strengthened by showing the continuity of Kuyper's thought with that of Groen van Prinsterer, while the connection to Burke is noted several times. However, Heslam has not marred the image of Kuyper in these attempts to render him intelligible to a later audience. To the contrary, he has provided a very literate and useful replica. It may even prove that future studies of Kuyper will be held up against Heslam's icon.

This volume also indicates the pragmatic efficacy of Roman Catholic and Reformed cooperation in social issues, it accurately displays Kuyper's philosophy of education (and founding of the Free University) against the Dutch relief, it explicates Kuyper's emphasis on the difference *palingenesis* makes for scientific theorizing, and it illustrates the affinity between Kuyper and *fin de siècle* American evangelicalism—a nexus that is frequently overlooked, minimized, or miscast. Heslam also perceptively notes that differences of interpretation of Kuyper stem from the interpreter's own choice to focus primarily on either common grace or antithesis as the core dynamic of this thought (18). The author has also clarified Kuyper's limited appreciation for and repudiation of Marxism (99).

Moreover, the enduring significance of Kuyper's views will remain important, as Heslam suggests, while "postmodern people of today find much to agree with in Kuyper's critique of modernity, especially its core beliefs in human progress and autonomy" (ix). With the ubiquity of the notion of worldview, and with the continuing need to critique pantheism in modern and future discussions, Kuyper's thought will remain an important part of the arsenal of public theologians.

Such analysis of a Dutch Calvinist by a British Anglican must surely bring a smile to Kuyper in Abraham's bosom as a vindication of his belief in common grace. It also will become necessary material for discussions about the future of Calvinism. Both volumes are contributions that will help unveil one of the most influential hidden hands of our time.