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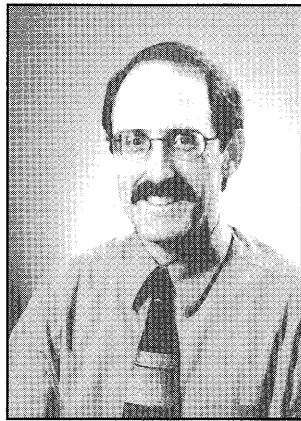
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Common Grace or the Antithesis? Towards a Consistent Understanding of Kuyper's "Sphere Sovereignty"



by Tim McConnel

Introduction

When Abraham Kuyper presented his seminal speech on "Sphere Sovereignty" at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, he used his key phrase in two different ways. The first usage of "sphere sovereignty" referred to the different spheres or areas of life, which are free to develop within their own bounds, following their own God-given laws. These spheres, such as the family, education, the state, and the church, were derived from the structure of human life in the creational

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order. The second usage, later in the speech, referred to the freedom for different philosophies or "life-principles" to develop across the whole "sphere" of thought. This usage was based on the conflict Kuyper perceived between the different ideological groups within society. Was Kuyper confused and inconsistent in this presentation? Was his approach contradictory at the core? Or did this twofold development of his theme, admittedly in very different senses, reveal an underlying unity in his thought that spanned his lengthy, illustrious career?

In his excellent study on Abraham Kuyper entitled *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*, Peter S. Heslam argues the following:

It should be pointed out here that this secondary meaning of the concept of sphere sovereignty was incompatible with the first.... The contention of this book is that the same confusion amounted to two usages, one creational and the other socio-ideological; that the two were irreconcilable with each other; and that this double usage is likely to have served as a stimulus to the development of *verzuiling* in Dutch society.²

Heslam claims to be following Herman Dooyeweerd's critique in this problem in Kuyper.³ William Edgar, in his review of Heslam's work, seems to agree, and if anything states it more strongly when he summarizes Heslam's thinking,

Heslam's point is that there was confusion in Kuyper's writings between at least two notions of the spheres, one from the Creation, the other an organic social or ideological grouping. Though contradictory, the double usage is the key to the later development of *verzuiling* in Dutch society.⁴

However, as James D. Bratt points out in his introductory remarks to Kuyper's essay "Sphere Sovereignty," there seems to be a studied ambiguity in the Dutch term itself, pointing to its application in both senses, as Kuyper did within the essay.⁵ The two usages do not function as an exact parallel, as the first refers to God's creation and the second to the working out of human sinfulness and redemption in society, as Heslam and Edgar note. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this paper that the two usages do not display a confusion in Kuyper's thought but an application of his tension between common grace and the antithesis, and thus demonstrate his ability to hold them in balance—something many of his followers have had trouble doing. Sphere sovereignty as a notion is distinct from common grace and the antithesis, but Kuyper's twofold exposition of it in his speech in 1880 is consistent with his later developments of these themes. As each are explained in turn below, it will become clear that the two usages are neither confused nor contradictory, but consistently fit together in Kuyper's thought.

Sphere Sovereignty

The notion of sphere sovereignty was developed early by Kuyper as the justification for his political and educational endeavours. The definitive statement of his view was given in the speech he delivered at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, on October 20, 1880. It was published at the same time as *Souvereïnteit in Eigen Kring*. The title translated literally is "Sovereignty in Its Own Circle." As mentioned above, Bratt suggests that the very title points to an ambiguity in Kuyper's thought and use of the term. On the one hand, the first usage of the term "circle" refers to the different spheres of human life, such as art, education, the family, the church, the state, etc. Kuyper viewed each of these as answering directly to God as a result of creation. In this view, the differences between the spheres are ontological in nature, and each sphere displays development due to God's "common grace." On the other hand, the second usage of the term is that the various "circles" refer to those who hold differing world-views. This second approach would divide each sphere of human life into two or more partitions. Each world-view "circle" then, according to Kuyper, must be given the freedom to work out its own principles in every area of life.

In this second usage, the differences are ethical and epistemological, and express the working out of the antithesis. The first usage generally dominated Kuyper's thought regarding sphere sovereignty, but the latter usage is also clearly there, as will be shown below.

Kuyper located the origin of sphere sovereignty in the sovereignty of God, who established each of the various spheres of life:

This perfect sovereignty of the sinless Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among sinful men on earth, and does so by dividing life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty.... Just as we speak of a "moral world," a "scientific world," a "business world," the "world of art," so we can more properly speak of a "sphere" of morality, of the family, of social life, each with its own *domain*. And because each comprises its own domain, each has its own Sovereign within its bounds.⁶

Kuyper saw a multitude of divinely established, intermeshing spheres as comprising the complexity of human life. The State had a special function of protecting individuals and of defining the relationships among the various other spheres; but its role was to acknowledge the authority of other spheres, not to confer authority upon them.⁷ In Kuyper's view, the only safeguard for freedom was to submit to the sovereignty of God in every area. This submission would prevent the State from claiming supreme sovereignty, which is its sinful tendency. For Kuyper, the totalitarian state was the natural outworking of the principles of the "Revolution." The followers of the "Revolution" were those who rejected revelation and replaced it with the autonomy of human thought, as typified for Kuyper by the French Revolution. This opposing principle saw the highest sovereignty as embodied in the supreme State, the final authority for all other spheres of life.

The last section of his speech, in which he focused on sphere sovereignty "As a Reformed Principle," developed the second usage of Kuyper's notion. In it he argued for the necessity of a university founded on Reformed principles that would be able to develop freely those principles. He based this argument on the subjective character of knowledge, and argued, as in his later writings on the antithesis, that the Christian principle affects every area of scholarship:

I readily grant that if our natural sciences strictly limited themselves to weighing and measuring, the wedge of principle would not be at the door. But who would do that? What natural scientist operates without a hypothesis? Does not everyone who practices science as a man and not as a measuring stick view things through a subjective lens and always filling the unseen part of the circle according to subjective opinion?⁸

The inevitable “subjective opinion” to which Kuyper refers he would later call the conflict in “world-views.” Thus, he argued that in scholarship there must be freedom for each group or circle to work out its own principle. Kuyper goes on to claim the following:

Rather, considering that something begins from principle and that a distinct entity takes rise from a distinct principle, we shall maintain a distinct sovereignty for our own principle and for that of our opponents across the whole sphere of thought. That is to say, as from their principle and by a method appropriate to it they erect a house of knowledge that glitters but does not entice us, so we too form our principle and by its corresponding method will let our own trunk shoot up whose branches, leaves, and blossom are nourished with its own sap.⁹

Note that while Kuyper was arguing for the right of Calvinists to establish their own educational institution on the basis of sphere sovereignty, he was also safeguarding the right of his opponents to do the same. In effect, in his development of the second usage of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper argued for a pluralism without succumbing to a notion of ethical or epistemological relativism.

As he came near to the end of this seminal speech, Kuyper sounded the cry for action in terms that recalled his emphasis on the antithesis, but especially sounded the note so dear to his Calvinist heritage, that of the sovereignty of Christ:

How could it be otherwise? Man in his antithesis as fallen *sinner* or self-developing *natural creature* returns again as the ‘subject that thinks’ or ‘the object that prompts thought’ in every department, in every discipline, and with every investigator. Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: “Mine!”¹⁰

These words were a call for the Christian to social and academic engagement, not withdrawal from the world. This call recognizes the sovereignty of Christ

over every area of human endeavor, reflecting Kuyper’s first usage of sphere sovereignty, but it also indicates the need to subject oneself to Christ in these cultural endeavors, which, in the “antithesis as fallen sinner,” necessitates his second usage. It also underscores the fact that Kuyper was seeking both to confirm and to build on the Reformed heritage, to extend it in the face of the circumstances of the modern world.¹¹

The Antithesis

The term “antithesis” had been popularized in nineteenth-century philosophy by Hegel’s use of it.

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sovereignty of Christ.*

Kuyper took over the term, but gave it his own specific meaning. He also developed his notion of the antithesis in terms of a Christian world-view, as opposed to a non-Christian world-view.¹²

The classic exposition of Kuyper’s notion of the antithesis occurs in his *Principles of Sacred Theology* (volume two of the *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*).¹³ He outlines the application of the antithesis to world-views in *Calvinism*.¹⁴

Kuyper began developing his notion of the antithesis in the second part of the *Principles of Sacred Theology*, entitled “The Organism of Science,” specifically in his discussion of “Science Impaired by Sin.”¹⁵ Here he identified a number of ways in which sin interferes with the pursuit of any science, resulting in falsehood, mistakes, and self-deceit. “The chiefest harm,” he writes,

is the ruin, worked by sin, in those data, which were at our command, for obtaining the knowledge of God, and thus for forming the conception of the whole. Without the sense of God in the heart no one shall ever attain unto a knowledge of God, and without love, or, if you please, a holy sympathy for God, that knowledge shall never be rich in content. Every effort to prove the existence of God by so-called evidence must fail and has failed. By this we do not mean that the knowledge of God must be mystic; for as soon as this knowledge of God is to be scientifically unfolded, it must be reproduced

from our thinking consciousness. But as our science in no single instance can take one forward step, except a bridge is built between the subject and the object, it cannot do so here. If thus in our sense of self there is no sense of the existence of God, and if in our spiritual existence there is no bond which draws us to God, and causes us in love to go out unto him, all science is here impossible.¹⁶

This quote contains the basic thrust of Kuyper's notion of the antithesis. He distinguished between those who can and those who cannot obtain a true knowledge of God. There must be a spiritual bond with God in order to have knowledge of God; and not everyone has this bond. His argument also reveals his own attitude towards a traditional apologetic based on proofs for the existence of God. Kuyper simply states that they fail, and furthermore implies that the one who lacks any sense of God will simply reject such proofs.

Kuyper went on to connect this failure in the knowledge of God with failure in the knowledge of the cosmos as a whole. He argued that in order to answer basic questions about the cosmos as a whole, such as its origin and end, "in your consciousness you must step out from the cosmos, and you must have a starting-point . . . in the *non-cosmos*; and this is altogether impossible as long as sin confines you with your consciousness to the cosmos."¹⁷ Kuyper found the starting point he needed in God's revelation.

What did a starting point mean for the attainment of truth? In his section on "Truth," Kuyper introduces the terms "antithesis" and "world-view" into his argument. Here he distinguishes between mere observation in the "domain of pure matter" and the "domain of the real spiritual sciences," the latter of which he thought had shown very little agreement or unity in results. He explains this fact in the following way:

Because here the subjective factor becomes preponderant; and this subjective factor is dependent upon the antithesis between falsehood and truth; so that both the insight into the facts and the structure which one builds upon this insight must differ, and at length become, first contrary and then contradictory.

The fatality of the antithesis between falsehood and truth consists in this, that every man from his point of view claims the truth for himself, and applies the epithet of "untrue" to everything that opposes this.¹⁸

According to Kuyper this conflict explains the development of opposing schools of thought:

If this concerns a mere point of detail, it has no further results; but if this antithesis assumes a more universal and radical character, school will form itself against school, system against system, world-view against world-view, and two entirely different and mutually exclusive representations of the object, each in organic relation, will come at length to dominate whole series of subjects. From both sides it is said: "Truth is with us, and falsehood is with you." And the notion that science can settle this dispute is of course entirely vain, for we speak of two all-embracing representations of the object, both of which have been obtained as the result of very serious scientific study.¹⁹

Note that Kuyper here connects the "antithesis" between truth and falsehood with a difference in "world-views." He recognizes the inevitability of a subjective factor in knowledge, and thus even the desirability of dealing with that factor; yet he also insists that in a fallen world, sin prevents the possibility of a general agreement, due to that subjective factor.

Kuyper spells out both the basis and the results of the antithesis in the area of knowledge through his analysis of "The Twofold Development of Science." Beginning with the notion that there are "Two Kinds of People," he argues that the unity of the human consciousness is broken by the fact of regeneration. He concludes the following,

We speak none too emphatically, therefore, when we speak of two kinds of people. Both are human, but one is inwardly different from the other, and consequently feels a different content rising from his consciousness; thus they face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses. And the fact that there are two kinds of people occasions of necessity the fact of two kinds of human life and consciousness of life, and of two kinds of science; for which reason the idea of the unity of science, taken in its absolute sense, implies the denial of the fact of palingenesis,²⁰ and therefore from principle leads to the rejection of the Christian religion.²¹

For Kuyper, to deny this distinction in fact proves it, as the denial involves the rejection of the Christian religion, a rejection which is the operating principle of unregenerate humanity!

The "Two Kinds of Science" thus results directly from the two kinds of people. Kuyper clearly states

that he does not mean that there are two different “representations of the cosmos” that are equally valid. Ultimately, only one can be true, and thus the other must be false. He explains the difference in this way:

But however much they may be doing the same thing formally, their activities run in opposite directions, because they have different starting-points; and because of the difference in their nature they apply themselves differently to this work, and view things in a different way. Because they themselves are differently constituted, they see a corresponding difference in the constitution of all things. They are not at work, therefore, on different parts of the same house, but each builds a house of his own.²²

Kuyper goes on to say that, while the builders of each house can recognize the “scientific character” of the other’s efforts, they are bound by their own principles to reject the other’s work as false.

However, Kuyper immediately mitigates this stark contrast by giving several reasons why this division has often not been apparent. First, he distinguishes between the “natural” and the “spiritual”²³ sciences. The beginnings of the former consist of observation and the operations of weighing, measuring, and counting:

The entire domain of the more primary observation, which limits itself to weights, measures and numbers, is common to both. The entire empiric investigation of the things that are perceptible to our sense (simple or reinforced) has nothing to do with the radical difference which separates the two groups. By this we do not mean, that the natural sciences as such and in their entirety, fall outside of this difference, but only that in these sciences the differences which separate the two groups exert no influence on the beginnings of the investigation.²⁴

Thus Kuyper claims a large “common realm” that both kinds of science share, in the area of empirical observation. Regeneration does not give new sense organs or change the ones which all people share in common. He also recognizes a common realm in the “spiritual sciences” as well, using examples from history and the study of language.²⁵ In general, Kuyper recognizes a more “objective” area of study in all sciences, in which the fact of *palingenesis* plays no discernible role.

Kuyper also sees logic as part of the common realm of the two kinds of science. He argues that the “formal process” of thought has not been

attacked by sin, and thus is shared by both kinds of people. While the starting point, and therefore the conclusions, are radically different, the reasoning process remains the same. Thus, each side can understand and follow the demonstration of the other. As Kuyper puts it,

...the accuracy of one another’s demonstrations can be critically examined and verified, in so far at least as the result strictly depends upon the deduction made. By keeping a sharp watch upon each other, mutual service is rendered in the discovery of logical faults in each other’s demonstrations, and thus in a formal way each will continually watch over the other.²⁶

Although he claimed that they shared a “common realm,” Kuyper emphasized that there were two kinds of science.

He concludes that in spite of the inevitability and irreconcilability of the divergence between the two kinds of science, nevertheless there is some common task to almost every form of science, and that both sides are able to give a clear account of their starting point.

Another reason for continued agreement between the two kinds of science, according to Kuyper, is the fact that *palingenesis* is a slow process that begins with repentance and conversion and continues to develop over a person’s lifetime. The fact and effects of sin remain with the regenerate so that they continue to experience a false “unity” with the unregenerate in any number of areas in science.²⁷ However, Kuyper expected the separation of the two kinds of science to continue, and to become more pronounced as the various sciences progressed. The previous unity had been only apparent. He argues the point in these terms:

Neither the tardiness, however, of the establishment of this bifurcation of science, nor the futile effort of Conservatism to prolong its existence, can resist the continuous separation of these two kinds of science. The all-decisive question here is whether there are two points of departure. If this is not the case, then unity must be maintained by means of the stronger

mastering the weaker; but if there are two points of departure, then the claim of two kinds of science in the indicated sense remains indisputably valid, entirely apart from the question whether both will succeed in developing themselves for any good result within a given time. This twofold point of departure is certainly given by palingenesis.²⁸

Kuyper pointed to the universities at Brussels, Louvain, Amsterdam (his own institution), and Freiburg as the places where an attempt was being made to develop science on a consistently Christian basis.

At this point in his argument Kuyper emphasizes the subjective aspect of knowledge. In this regard, he writes the following:

In the abstract every one concedes that the subjective assimilation of the truth concerning the object cannot be the same with all, because the investigating individuals are not as alike as drops of water, but as unlike as blades of grass and leaves on a tree. That a science should be free from the influence of the subjective factor is inconceivable, hence with the unlikeness of the individuals the influence of this factor must appear.²⁹

In as much as regeneration affects human consciousness at its deepest level, and in every aspect, Kuyper regards it as the fundamental dividing point for human consciousness, and hence for science.

Kuyper admits that as soon as the two kinds of science developed separate results, they would no longer acknowledge the other side as being science, but rather as being “science falsely so called.” He puts it this way:

So far, on the other hand, as the antithesis between our human personality, as it manifests itself in sinful nature and is changed by palingenesis, governs the investigation and demonstration, we stand exclusively opposed to one another, and one must call falsehood what the other calls truth.³⁰

The existence of two kinds of science does not mean, therefore, that the different sides recognize each other as valid. They may have a “formal” appreciation for the other science, but can only accept as true what is in accord with their own premises. Kuyper also explains that neither side has unity in its own development, due to the subjective factor. Rather, both kinds have experienced the development of numerous schools of thought in the various sciences. However, he does not consider this development to be necessarily negative, as this is the process by which science advances.

Kuyper’s conclusion on the impact of the antithesis on knowledge is that Christian and naturalistic science not only operate with different theologies, but develop different sciences.

The proposition, that in virtue of the fact of palingenesis a science develops itself by the side of the naturalistic, which, though formally allied to it, is differently disposed, and therefore different in its conclusions, and stands over against it as *Christian* science, must not be understood in a specifically theological, but in an absolutely *universal* sense. The difference between the two is not merely apparent in theological science, but in *all* the sciences, in so far as the fact of palingenesis governs the *whole* subject in *all* investigations, and hence also, the result of all these investigations as far as their data are not absolutely material.³¹

Naturalistic science and Christian science each claim to be true whereas the other is false; they are formally similar, but operate on different premises and hence reach different conclusions. The divergence between the two is not limited to theology but extends to every area of human knowledge, inasmuch as the knowing subject is either regenerate or unregenerate.

Kuyper’s division between Christian and naturalistic science is consistent with his second usage of “sphere sovereignty.” Both types of science demand the freedom to be developed from their own controlling principles, and should be allowed to do so.

World-Views as an Expression of the Antithesis

Kuyper went on to develop his notion of sphere sovereignty and antithesis further into a Christian world-view. He did so especially in his initial Stone Foundation Lecture, delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898, where he urged that Calvinism be understood as a whole “life-system” that included politics, science and art, as well as theology.³²

Early in the first lecture, Kuyper alludes to his Anti-Revolutionary background by raising the spectre of Modernism in its fullest sense, not restricting it to the theological realm as he had earlier in his career.³³ Now he links it directly to the French Revolution:

But, in deadly opposition to this Christian element, against the very Christian name, and against its salutiferous influence in every sphere of life, the storm

of Modernism has now arisen with violent intensity. In 1789 the turning point was reached.³⁴

Thus Kuyper points to the ideology of the Revolution as being directed against Christianity. He goes on to say, "There is no doubt then that Christianity is imperiled by great and serious dangers. Two *life-systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat."³⁵

In a footnote, Kuyper explains his use of the term "life systems" thus:

As Dr. James Orr ... observes, the German technical term *Weltanschauung* has no precise equivalent in English. He therefore used the literal translation view of the world, notwithstanding this phrase in English is limited by associations, which connect it predominately with physical nature. For this reason the more explicit phrase: Life and world view seems to be more preferable. My American friends, however, told me that the shorter phrase: life system, on the other side of the ocean, is often used in the same sense.³⁶

At that time, the English term "worldview" had not yet come into general acceptance. Kuyper clearly intended his use of the term "life system" to include the broadest view of reality, which undergirds all other beliefs and actions. He expresses himself in this way:

From the first, therefore, I have always said to myself,—"If the battle is to be fought with honor and with a hope of victory, then principle must be arrayed against principle; then it must be felt that in Modernism the vast energy of an all-embracing life-system assails us, then also it must be understood that we have to take our stand in a life-system of equally comprehensive and far-reaching power. And this powerful life-system is not to be invented nor formulated by ourselves, but is to be taken and applied as it presents itself in history. When thus taken, I found and confessed, and I still hold, that this manifestation of the Christian principle is given us in Calvinism."³⁷

While Kuyper's opening mentions just two world-views as being in conflict, the later parts of the chapter refer to numerous other worldviews: Romanism and Lutheranism as other Christian world-views; Islamism and Paganism as other non-Christian world-views. Kuyper views Calvinism as the purest manifestation of the Christian principle, and also considered Modernism to be the chief threat to Christianity in Europe and America. Although recognizing a greater complexity to the world, Kuyper

epitomizes the contemporary antithesis as a battle between the systems of Modernism and Calvinism.³⁸

Kuyper considers one's understanding of three key relationships as essential for a general system of life. These include "(1) our relation to *God*, (2) our relation to *man*, and (3) our relation to the *world*."³⁹ After discussing the various ways in which these

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be understood as a whole
"life-system."*

relationships have been developed in different world-views, Kuyper concludes that Calvinism offers a distinct view on each of these points:

Thus it is shown that Calvinism has a sharply-defined starting-point of its own for the three fundamental relations of all human existence: viz., our relation to God, to man and to the world. For our relation to God: an immediate fellowship of man with the Eternal, independently of priest or church. For the relation of man to man: the recognition in each person of human worth, which is his by virtue of his creation after the Divine likeness, and therefore of the equality of all men before God and his magistrate. And for our relation to the world: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.⁴⁰

This last relationship points us to the next aspect of Kuyper's thought, that of the doctrine of common grace, as well as back to his notion of sphere sovereignty.

In his last Stone Lecture, dealing with "Calvinism and the Future," Kuyper gave this charge to his Princeton audience:

With such a coherent world and life-view, firmly resting on its principle and self-consistent in its splendid structure, Modernism now confronts Christianity; and against this deadly danger, ye, Christians, cannot successfully defend your sanctuary, but by placing, in opposition to all this, *a life-and world-view of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency.*⁴¹

Thus Kuyper sought to respond to the challenge of Modernism by using modern means, namely the development of a consistent, self-conscious worldview based on the traditional Christian beliefs of orthodox Calvinism. His development of a “world-view” analysis had by this time replaced Kuyper’s earlier second usage of the notion of “sphere sovereignty,” while maintaining the same distinction between opposing systems of thought across the various spheres of human life.

Common Grace

Kuyper’s notion of common grace underlay his positive, world-engaging approach to Calvinism in the Stone Lectures. He developed this notion over a period of years, 1895 to 1901, in his weekly columns in *De Heraut (The Herald)*. These were later collected and published in three volumes as *De Gemeene Gratie (Common Grace)*.⁴² In his chapter on “The Forms of Grace,” Kuyper distinguishes two basic forms: special grace, which is saving grace, and common grace, which is extended to all aspects of life. He writes,

For this reason we must distinguish two dimensions in this manifestation of grace: 1. A saving grace, which in the end abolishes sin and completely undoes its consequences; and 2. A temporal restraining grace, which holds back and blocks the effect of sin. The former, that is saving grace, is in the nature of the case special and restricted to God’s elect. The second, common grace, is extended to the whole of our human life.⁴³

For Kuyper the doctrine of common grace expresses God’s gracious dealing with this fallen world in two different aspects. First, sin is restrained and the effects of sin tempered. In this sense, common grace serves a necessary, albeit negative role. God’s grace holds back human rebellion, and furthermore, alleviates to a large extent the destructive results of that rebellion. This grace allows, secondly, for the possibility of human development of culture and society. All good gifts, whether employed by believers or unbelievers, are seen to come from God, and to result in the glory of God. As a result, believers can enter into cooperation with unbelievers in the various cultural tasks, e.g. science and politics. As Kuyper states, “The fundamental creation ordinance given before the fall, that humans would achieve dominion over all of nature thanks to ‘common grace,’ is still realized *after* the fall.”⁴⁴ Kuyper sees

God as working through common grace to restrain the effects of sin, and thereby to develop the creation through human cultural development.

For Kuyper, special grace presupposes common grace, and could not function without it. While he sees a major purpose of common grace being that of preparation for the special grace given to God’s elect, he definitely does not confine the purpose or operation of common grace to salvation. Rather, he puts both special grace and common grace into a doxological context, namely that all things are done to the glory of God. He goes so far as to subsume common grace under special grace in the following way:

In that sense, then we must acknowledge that common grace is only an emanation of special grace and that all its fruit flows into special grace—provided it is understood that special grace is by no means exhausted in the salvation of the elect but has its ultimate end only in the Son’s glorification of the Father’s love, and so in the aggrandizement of the perfections of our God.⁴⁵

Kuyper does not see either special grace or common grace as operating on its own, but rather as being intertwined in accomplishing God’s purposes. To express this relationship, he compares them to two branches of one tree. Both branches of grace are rooted in Christ:

Does not the apostle write to the church of Colosse that the self-same Christ is simultaneously two things: the root of the life of creation as well as the root of the life of the new creation? First we read that Christ is “the first-born of all creation, for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth,” so that he is “before all things and in him all things hold together.” It could hardly be stated more plainly and clearly that Christ is the root of creation and therefore of common grace, for it is common grace that prevents things from sinking into nothingness. (Does not the text say that all things hold together in him?) But we immediately note in the second place that the same Christ is “the Head of the Body and the first-born from the dead,” hence also the root of the life of the new creation or of special grace. The two things are even stated in parallel terms: he is the root of common grace, for his is the first-born of all creation, and simultaneously the root of special grace, for he is the first-born from the dead. There is thus no doubt that common grace and special grace come most intimately connected from their origin, and this connection lies in Christ.⁴⁶

By focusing on Christ, rather than merely on one's own salvation, the believer is relieved of the tension of relating common grace to special grace in an unbalanced way. Kuyper sees this sort of imbalance as tending toward the Anabaptist error that sharply distinguishes between the spiritual realm and the world all around. Instead, creation and redemption both belong to Christ, and redemption is of the whole world, not just human souls. He concludes his chapter on the "Two Forms of Grace" by claiming the following,

For that reason Scripture continually points out that the *Savior* of the world is also the *Creator* of the world, indeed that he could become its Savior only because he already was its *Creator*. Of course, it was not the *Son of man*, not the *incarnate Word*, who created the world. All that was human in the Mediator was itself created, creaturely as it is creaturely in us. Still, Scripture repeatedly points out that he, the first-born of the dead, is also the first-born of creation, that the Word Incarnate nevertheless always was and remained the same eternal Word who was with God and was God, of whom it is written that without that Word nothing was made that is made. Christ then is connected with *nature* because he is its Creator, and at the same time connected to *grace* because, as Re-creator, he manifested the riches of grace in the midst of that nature.⁴⁷

In this way Kuyper roots both common grace and special grace in Christ: common grace in Christ as Creator, special grace in Christ as Redeemer. In every aspect Christ is to be seen as Lord and Sovereign over all.

In fact, Kuyper views the doctrine of common grace as an implication of the Reformed doctrine of the sovereignty of God. As he expresses it in his foreword to *Common Grace*,

... the doctrine of common grace proceeds directly from the Sovereignty of the Lord which is ever the root conviction of all Reformed thinking. If God is sovereign, then his Lordship must remain over all life and thinking. If God is sovereign, then his Lordship must remain over all life and cannot be closed up within church walls or Christian circles. The extra-Christian world has not been given over to satan or to fallen humanity or to chance. God's Sovereignty is great and all-ruling also in unbaptized realms, and therefore neither Christ's work in the world nor that of God's child can be pulled back out of life. If his God works in the world, then there he must put his hand to the plow so that there too the Name of the Lord is glorified.⁴⁸

A major part of Kuyper's agenda in writing the lengthy series of articles on common grace for *De Heraut* was to call the Reformed community in the Netherlands to action. He completed the series as he was about to become prime minister of the Netherlands in 1900, and it was published in book form during the latter part of his term. The doctrine

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of common grace provided the theological justification and the spiritual motivation for Christians to be actively involved in every aspect of their culture, including politics, science, and the arts. Common grace also provided an understanding of history, from paradise to the Second Coming, as the outworking of God's sovereign plan for humanity, in cultural and scientific development, as much as in spiritual and ecclesiastical growth. All people, believers and unbelievers alike, serve God through the developments of human history.

Conclusion

Sphere sovereignty provided Kuyper with a conceptual tool for Christian action in society in its various aspects. God had created all things, and Christians were called to develop each "sphere" in accordance to its own God-given ordering and potential. Kuyper himself contributed significantly in a number of different spheres during his career. As an educator, he founded and taught at the Free University of Amsterdam. As a politician, he started the first modern political party in the Netherlands, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and served in parliament, including four years as prime minister of the Netherlands. He spent several decades as a journalist, editing a daily paper. As a pastor, he opposed liberalism in the church of his day, and was one of the leaders of an eventual split from the state church. In theology, he contributed the works surveyed above, as well as a lengthy commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism and three volumes of collected columns on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Abraham Kuyper's most enduring legacy has been in the realm of theology, and particularly in his

attempt to take account of both common grace and the antithesis. The former provided a basis for unity and cooperation in the cultural task, while the latter maintained a sharp distinction and even cleavage. Kuyper held this tension in balance consistently throughout his career, as can be seen in his 1880 speech on "Sphere Sovereignty." While the doctrines of common grace and the antithesis had not yet been worked out by Kuyper at that point, their presence is felt.

Common grace, according to Kuyper, was the basis of human achievements in the different spheres of life. Progress can and has been made in each of the spheres as creation has been developed through human history. While it has clearly been tainted by sin, yet the progress has been real and will rebound to the glory of God. Kuyper's first usage of "Sphere Sovereignty," the different societal spheres, and common grace were both firmly rooted by Kuyper in creation, and both were seen as expressions of the sovereignty of God. To repeat his claim from *Common Grace*, "If God is sovereign then his Lordship must remain over *all* life and thinking."⁴⁹ This statement clearly echoes his theme from "Sphere Sovereignty": "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"⁵⁰

On the other hand, the antithesis demanded a separate development by the regenerate and unregenerate in every area. In "Sphere Sovereignty" Kuyper also argued in his second usage of the term that there must be freedom for developing scholarship in every area from the Reformed principle, in contrast to the opposing principles of his "opponents." By the time of the Stone Lectures, he had developed this analysis into a call for developing a consistent and well-thought out Christian worldview to oppose "Modernism." Kuyper never denied the accomplishments of the unregenerate, but he always saw the need for the regenerate to build consistently on their own principles.

For Kuyper, to have abandoned either of the usages of "Sphere Sovereignty" in his inaugural speech would have been to deny either the goodness of God's creation and providence or the pervasive effects of sin on humanity. This Kuyper was unwill-

ing to do, and we would do well to emulate his example as we engage our own culture in our day.

ENDNOTES

1. Abraham Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring: Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten October 1880 gehouden, in het Koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880). This work was republished in W. F. de Gaay Fortman, ed., *Architectonische critiek: Fragmenten uit de sociaal-politieke geschriften van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1956). A slightly abridged translation by George Kamp, edited by James D. Bratt, appears as "Sphere Sovereignty" in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).
2. Peter S. Hieslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 160. *Verzuiling*, or "pillarization," was a practice during the earlier part of the twentieth century in the Netherlands of the ideological grouping of society, including Catholics, Calvinists, socialists, etc. Each group developed on its own such institutions as schools, newspapers, and labor unions. This is one approach to coexistence within a pluralistic society.
3. *Ibid.*, 160.
4. William Edgar, Review of *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* by Peter S. Hieslam, *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998): 356.
5. Introduction to "Sphere Sovereignty," in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 461-462. Bratt suggests applying Heidegger's twofold division of "Being and Time" to Kuyper's two usages.
6. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467.
7. In the immediate application of sphere sovereignty to his historical situation, Kuyper was justifying the founding of a "Free University"; that is, one that was free from state control. Freedom to do so had just recently been granted in the Netherlands, and was one of Kuyper's early political goals. Thus, the sphere of education and scholarship was fundamentally independent of the state in Kuyper's view, and could not legitimately be made to serve state purposes of an ideological nature.
8. "Sphere Sovereignty," 487-488.
9. *Ibid.*, 484-485.
10. *Ibid.*, 488.
11. Gordon J. Spykman, in "Sphere Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin: Essays in Honor of John*

- Bratt, edited by David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), argues that the notion of sphere sovereignty finds its beginnings in Calvin, who left it as an undeveloped idea, and has been extended by subsequent Reformed theologians, including Kuyper and Bavinck, but also their successors, including H. Dooyeweerd. Spykman wrote, "What was left to later Calvinists was to take the germinal principle of sphere-sovereignty in Calvin, delineate it more clearly with respect to church and state, and then to extend it to the other spheres in society as one by one they came to the fore in more clearly differentiated ways: commerce, for example, arising from modern capitalism; labor unions, emerging from the Industrial Revolution; modern universities, resulting largely from the scientific explosion" (194). Spykman does a good job of addressing the historical development of the first usage of Kuyper's thought regarding sphere sovereignty, but does not deal with the second.
12. The Dutch term *wereldbeschouwing* (*Weltanschauung* in German) has no exact English equivalent, though the term "worldview" has become common since Kuyper's day. Early translators often used the cumbersome "life-and-world-view" or "life-system" when they did not want to bring over the Dutch or German term into popular discussion. The notion of the contrast between the Christian view and non-Christian view has a long pedigree in theology, dating at least as far back as Augustine's massive study on the *City of God*.
 13. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdeheid*, 3 vol. (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1894). Volume 1, Part 1, and Volume 2 were translated by J. Hendrik de Vries as *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980 [1898]).
 14. Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone Foundation Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931[1898]).
 15. This is the first part of volume two in the *Encyclopaedie*. Kuyper used "science" (*wetenschap*) broadly, as the equivalent to the German *Wissenschaft*. For an examination of Kuyper's use of the image of "organism," see K. Veling, "Kuyper's Visie op de Wetenschap als Organisme: Kanttekeningen bij een Metafoor," in *Bezielde Verband* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1984).
 16. *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 112-113.
 17. *Ibid.*, 113. This argument would seem to be applied to the materialistic scientific positivists who were beginning to gain influence in the late nineteenth century.
 18. *Ibid.*, 117.
 19. *Ibid.*, 117-118.
 20. Note that Kuyper often transliterated the Greek term *paliggenesiva* (Dutch, "*palingenesie*"; English, "*palingenesis*") rather than using the Dutch term "*wedergeboorte*" (English "regeneration"). This practice will be followed in the paper, since Kuyper's notion is somewhat different from the common evangelical usage that restricts regeneration to what Kuyper calls conversion.
 21. *Ibid.*, 154. A significant aspect of Kuyper's thought is revealed in this section. He argued that the subject of scientific endeavor is, properly speaking, the general human consciousness, and not particular individual scientists. Thus the idea that there is an antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate consciousness takes on a greater significance than that of individuals, but sharpens the cleavage within humanity as a whole. This approach to the problem reveals the degree to which Kuyper was influenced by nineteenth century idealistic thought.
 22. *Ibid.*, 155.
 23. The Dutch "*geestelijk*" (like the German "*geistig*") has no English equivalent; it can refer to either spiritual, mental, or intellectual, corresponding to the noun form "*geest*" (German "*Geist*"), which can mean spirit, mind, or intellect. The ambiguity in use can be intentional, making a translation difficult.
 24. *Ibid.*, 157.
 25. *Ibid.*, 159.
 26. *Ibid.*, 160.
 27. Kuyper also noted another, historical cause for the apparent unity of the two kinds of science, in that both kinds of science for several centuries operated under an outer conformity to special revelation, although the unregenerate never assimilated its point of view.
 28. *Ibid.*, 167-168.
 29. *Ibid.*, 169. Kuyper went on to make reference again to the "universal human consciousness" as being the "subject" of science. "For this reason science in its absolute sense is the property of no single individual. The universal human consciousness in its richest unfoldings is and ever will be the subject of science, and individuals in their circle and age can never be anything but sharers of a small division of science in a given form and seen in a given light." *Principles*, 169.
 30. *Ibid.*, 177.
 31. *Ibid.*, 181.
 32. Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone Foundation Lectures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931). This edition is more readily available than the original 1898 one published in Amsterdam. While Kuyper himself did not

translate his Dutch original into English, he played an active role in editing the English translation before its publication. It is his only work that was originally published in English, although later it was published in Dutch. The six lectures are entitled: "Calvinism a Life-system," "Calvinism and Religion," "Calvinism and Politics," "Calvinism and Science," "Calvinism and Art," and "Calvinism and the Future." A recent work that gives an extensive background on Kuyper by a thorough, historically grounded exposition of his Stone Lectures is Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

33. See Abraham Kuyper, "A Fata Morgana," *Methodist Review* 88 (1906): 185-208, 355-378. A more recent translation appears in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 87-124, as "Modernism: A Fata Morgana in the Christian Domain." The original was published as *Het Modernisme, een Fata Morgana op christelijk gebied* (Amsterdam: H. de Hoogh, 1871), from a lecture delivered on April 14, 1871 in Amsterdam.
34. *Calvinism*, 10.
35. *Ibid.*, 11.
36. *Ibid.*, 11, fn 1. See James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation, Being the Kerr Lectures for 1890-91* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948 [1897]), 3. Heslam writes of Kuyper, "Despite the existence of certain elements of this concept [i.e., worldview] in his earlier work, it was not until the Stone Lectures that he employed it in a deliberate and specific way, defining it in terms of *Weltanschauung* and using it to give shape to his entire body of thought" (92). Heslam goes on to attribute this change to Kuyper's encounter with James Orr's Kerr Lectures, *The Christian View of God and the World*. Heslam concludes, "The only significant difference between Orr's intention and that of Kuyper in presenting Calvinism as an independent and coherent world-view resistant to modernism, was that Orr pleaded the merits of a Christian worldview while Kuyper pleaded a specifically Calvinistic one—albeit Calvinistic in the broadest possible sense" (95).
37. *Calvinism*, 11-12.
38. At this point Kuyper did not follow the lead of Orr, who gave his taxonomy of world-views in note B to Lecture I, *Christian View*, 367-370. There Orr gave one classification as 1) Phenomenalistic and Agnostic; 2) Atomistic and Materialistic; 3) Pantheistic; and 4) Theistic. He gave a second classification as 1) Scientific; 2) Philosophical; and 3)

Religious. He admitted that the different types influence each other, so that in practice there are none free from outside influences. However, Orr's primary interest, like Kuyper's, was in the religious worldview, especially that of Christianity in opposition to modern world-views.

39. *Ibid.*, 19.
40. *Ibid.*, 31.
41. *Calvinism*, 189-190.
42. Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 volumes (Amsterdam: Hóveker & Wormser, 1902, 1903, 1904). See Introduction to "Common Grace" in Bratt, *Centennial Reader*, 165-166, for background. Kuyper's doctrine of common grace has generated a great deal of controversy, including a denominational split in the 1920's, when Herman Hoeksema and others who denied the doctrine left the Christian Reformed Church to start the Protestant Reformed Church. For the debates over common grace, see Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972; this includes the text of his 1947 *Common Grace*); S. J. Ridderbos, *Rondom het Gemene-Gratie-Probleem* (Kampen: Kok, 1949); William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953); and Jochem Douma, *Algemene Genada* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1966).
43. Bratt, *Centennial Reader*, 168. The selections from *De Gemeene Gratie* are translated by John Vriend.
44. *Ibid.*, 179.
45. *Ibid.*, 170-171.
46. *Ibid.*, 186-187. This is from his chapter on "The Contact of Sphere and Sphere." Here the "spheres" seem to be referring to the "spheres" of grace, i.e., special and common.
47. *Ibid.*, 173.
48. *Ibid.*, 166.
49. *Ibid.*, 166.
50. *Ibid.*, 488.

KUYPER'S THEOLOGY IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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