
Pro Rege

Volume 27 | Number 1


Article 2

September 1998

Kuyper's Legacy and Multiculturalism: Gender in his Conception of Democracy and Sphere Sovereignty

Hillie van de Streek

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

van de Streek, Hillie (1998) "Kuyper's Legacy and Multiculturalism: Gender in his Conception of Democracy and Sphere Sovereignty," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 27: No. 1, 16 - 24. Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol27/iss1/2

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

This paper was prepared for the Conference on Christianity and Culture: The heritage of Abraham Kuyper on different continents, June 9-11, 1998, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Kuyper's Legacy and Multiculturalism: Gender in his Conception of Democracy and Sphere Sovereignty



by Hillie J. van de Streek

In February 1998, Princeton Theological Seminary hosted a conference to celebrate the legacy of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Celebration turned to criticism when one of the keynote speakers, Yale philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, stated that Kuyper's notions of race

Drs. Hillie J. van de Streek is a lecturer in Dutch History in the Netherlands Studies Program in Contemporary Europe (N-SPICE) at Dordt College. She is also a staff member in Regional History at the Stichting IJsselacademie, Kampen, The Netherlands. She is presently writing a thesis on Gender and Christian politics in the Netherlands, 1890-1960.

and gender, not to mention his extreme patriotism, were "shameful." In response to Wolterstorff and further associations of Kuyper with discrimination and oppression, Princeton conferees passed the following resolution (nearly unanimously):

We, participants in the 1998 Kuyper Conference held at Princeton Theological Seminary, regard the legacy of Abraham Kuyper as a rich resource for Christian reflection and cultural engagement today. However, we profoundly regret the limitation and shameful distortions of the Gospel present in aspects of Kuyper's writings. In particular, we acknowledge that Kuyper's understanding of race and ethnicity, gender and sex have resulted in much pain and suffering.

In prayerful dependence on God, we commit ourselves, in working with the Kuyperian legacy, to redress these wrongs, and to engage in our academic and cultural callings in the spirit of the message and ministry of reconciliation which we share in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5).

Peter Schuurman, who reported about the resolution in the *Christian Courier*, concluded that the resolution would mean a great deal to those who have been hurt. "It will allow for dialogue in the future," he wrote, "and short-sighted aspects of the Kuyperian legacy will be given their proper historical place." The dialogue he referred to began in the *Courier's* same edition. Editor Bert Witvoet commented that he had never felt personally attacked by anything Kuyper had ever said or written. "Frankly," he wrote, "I am not aware of his understanding of sex, for example, but I can imagine that Kuyper was a man of his time. The distortions of the gospel present in Kuyper's

writings were distortions shared by the whole Christianized . . . Western world.”²

In his quick historical analysis, however, Witvoet is wrong: Kuyper’s perspective on gender was *not* shared by the whole Christianized world of his day; rather, it was highly debated. From about 1880 until the early 1920s, Christian circles were influenced by the so-called “first feminist wave,” when women in The Netherlands, as elsewhere in the western world, asked for equal access to all higher education and the labor market and demanded equal voting rights in politics and in the church. For example, in 1897 the Dutch Reformed Church began to debate the individual voting rights of women in the church and whether women could be ministers, using such passages as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. In 1902 its Synod rejected a proposal, with only ten votes against nine, that would have allowed women to become ministers, because it was considered not to be in accordance with the will of God. Twenty years later the Synod decided to give women the right to vote.³ The debate on women as ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church was not reopened until the late 1950s and 1960s.

This paper focuses on the historical development of the Christian debate over gender issues. It continues the dialogue about Kuyper’s view of gender begun at the Princeton Conference by comparing Kuyper’s pluralism with late twentieth-century pluralism, now equated with multiculturalism. In general, a pluralist society can be defined as a society consisting of several different minorities, based on certain cleavages in that society, like religion, ethnicity, politics, or social class. Kuyper had a similar view on society. In particular, his outlook was characterized by social justice and democracy, but also by the idea of sphere sovereignty, i.e. that society consists of several independent spheres of life, each with its own rights and duties. Kuyper’s pluralism, however, is significantly different from present-day pluralism (or multiculturalism) in its treatment of gender. In this paper I elaborate on Kuyper’s view of gender grounded in his pluralism, particularly within his conception of democracy and sphere sovereignty. I will develop the historical context referred to by Witvoet, then use this historical perspective to evaluate Kuyper’s legacy, and

compare his pluralism to late twentieth century multiculturalism.

Gender in Kuyper’s Thought on Democracy

Dutch Orthodox Protestant ministers, rather than theologians or other scholars from abroad, were instrumental in formulating neo-Calvinist conceptions of women.⁴ The neo-Calvinist approach to women’s roles in society was thus generally nationalist (i.e. Dutch) in orientation. (In this it differed from the Catholic view on women developed in the

*Kuyper’s perspective on
gender was not shared by
the whole Christianized
world of his day....*

same period by Pope Leo XIII, a view that had an international orientation.) Kuyper was the most influential of these Dutch pastors. After holding pastorates in several churches, Kuyper became interested in politics and engaged in political and theological controversies. He founded not only the Dutch Reformed Churches (GKN) and the Free University but also, in 1878, a neo-Calvinist political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP).

As did Pope Leo XIII in his well-known encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, Kuyper made known his views on women in response to the social problems stemming from the Industrial Revolution. This Revolution changed people’s lives significantly. Many peasants emigrated from the countryside to industrial towns to become factory laborers. Working conditions there were bad. Laborers worked long days of 12 hours or more, often in less than healthy conditions. Women and children, too, worked long days to provide income for their family. Furthermore, housing was in short supply and of poor quality and there were no adequate health-care facilities. Kuyper, Pope Leo XIII, and other so called “christian-social” reformers proposed that working days should be shortened, that the labor of women and children should be reduced, and that a man should earn an income on which he and his

family could live. These ideas were inspired by the Bible. Kuyper also, on the basis of certain biblical texts, claimed that God had ordained family-life. A man had to be the head of the household and his wife was to be subject to him; a woman's proper place was in the family as wife and mother. This subordination of a woman to her husband made sense, according to Kuyper, because it imaged the subordination of the Church to Christ and of Christ to the Father (Ephesians 5).

Kuyper categorized life into two spheres: public and private. The public sphere concerned life outside the home, namely politics, science, labor, and the church. Men, Kuyper argued, possessed talents for participating in public life. Women's talents, in contrast, lay in the private sphere of life revolving around the family and the home. Hence, a woman's proper role was to raise children and perform domestic chores. By no means was a married woman to enter the political arena or the paid labor force. For Kuyper, the only acceptable activity for a woman outside the home was to serve as a volunteer in areas of social welfare, health care, and child rearing.

Kuyper elaborated on these views most extensively in *De eerepositie der vrouw (The Woman's Position of Honor)*, published in 1914. (In 1906 he also published a book on *Women of the Old Testament*.) Especially his ideas from the publication from 1914 found political support in the ARP and a splinter group of this party, the Christian Historical Union (CHU).⁵ These parties, along with the Catholic People's Party, were all based on Christian political thought. There were also parties based on secular political thought. Among these were the Social Democrats and several Liberal parties. Because the Christian parties were certain that they understood the mind of God concerning the nature and role of women, they labeled Liberal, Feminist, and Socialist thought as anti-Christian and therefore dangerous. They worked hard to prevent society from developing in a secular direction.

Their first challenge arose in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the Dutch women's movement, the Liberals, and the Social Democrats began to campaign for universal suffrage. These groups argued that every individual, whether man or woman, should have the right to vote and be represented in parliament and in the provincial and

municipal councils. Their stance compelled the Christian parties to formulate a stance on women as well.

From its beginning, the ARP opposed universal suffrage. They maintained, according to Kuyper's principle of sphere sovereignty, that society is organic in character and that it consists of several, rather independent spheres such as the church, family, labor unions, politics, and so on. The ARP believed that the family was the nucleus of society, its most elemental sphere, and that the country would be at risk if the family was not respected and protected by legislation. Adopting universal suffrage would encourage individualism and deny the communal basis of the family. Kuyper therefore proposed that the head of the family should cast a vote for the entire household. This stance, "householder's suffrage," meant that all married men would be granted suffrage, as would all men living on their own. Kuyper asserted that the Bible clearly showed that women (and children) were not to be given the right to vote. When God declared in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him," he was ordaining the subordination of women to men. It was a pre-fall, creation ordinance.

The ARP could not reach a consensus on whether a widow should have a vote as replacement of a deceased male head of the family. Most party members did not want any woman to have suffrage; they argued that, according to the Holy Bible, a woman belonged in the private, not public, domain. Kuyper, however, stressed the argument that a widow must replace her husband as head of the family, a role that carried over into the public domain. Kuyper eventually prevailed. In its renewed program of basic principles of 1916, the ARP denied women individual suffrage but allowed widows the right to vote as a logical consequence of the principle of "householder's suffrage."

The Christian Historical Union generally agreed with Kuyper and the ARP that one (male) vote per household was sufficient. Gradually, however, another view gained support. A minority of liberal-minded Christian Historians stressed that women, too, had an individual political responsibility, even though their first place of course was in the home. They claimed that no Bible text prohibited women from casting votes or taking up seats in

parliament and the lower councils. Moreover, they argued, had not the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28 emphasized that there is neither male nor female, that all are one in Christ? Why, then, should man make a distinction where Christ did not? The CHU remained divided on this issue.

Kuyper Meets Critique: Herman Bavinck

In 1917, shortly after the renewal of the ARP's program of basic principles, an argument similar to that held in the CHU unexpectedly took root within Kuyper's party. The critique originated from Dr. Herman Bavinck, a Kuyperian theologian with nearly as renowned a reputation as Kuyper. Bavinck publicly disagreed with Kuyper over whether the subordination of women to men was creationally ordained. He focused on Genesis 1:27—not Genesis 2:18—as the basis for a biblical perspective on gender: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Bavinck inferred from this verse that God ordained man and woman to be equal and asserted that *this* pre-fall creation ordinance must guide all aspects of life. He concluded that since the Bible did not directly reject women's voting rights, the ARP's decision on the matter could take into account non-biblical factors such as the modernization of society and the changing roles of women. Even with the Bible in hand, Bavinck said that he could agree wholeheartedly with universal suffrage. He commented further that he expected female participants to enrich politics by adding new, "female" insights.⁶

Kuyper was furious. In *De Standaard*, the neo-Calvinist daily newspaper, he openly accused Bavinck of being a traitor of the ARP's basic principles. Kuyper reinterpreted one by one each Bible text Bavinck had mentioned in order to show that Bavinck was wrong. The angry editor ultimately concluded that the Bible did not contain a single passage from which the suffrage of women could be argued or justified and that Bavinck had been too much impressed by recent developments in society. Indeed, Kuyper argued, society was changing, but that did not mean that neo-Calvinists had to accept a situation that was deeply sinful in God's eyes. Claiming the correct theological analysis of the

Bible, Kuyper rejected Bavinck's theological exegesis.⁷ Bavinck reacted by publishing a monograph in 1918, *De Vrouw in de hedendaagsche maatschappij* (*The Woman in Contemporary Society*), a work of nearly 200 pages explaining his views. Any response Kuyper might have given was prevented by the illness that led to his death in 1920.

While Kuyper and Bavinck were debating the issue of gender roles, the Dutch government presented two bills concerning suffrage. In 1917 the Second Chamber debated whether to give women the right to stand for elections. The ARP

*The subordination of a
woman to her husband,
according to Kuyper,
imaged the subordination
of the Church to Christ and
of Christ to the Father.*

unanimously stuck to the principle of householder's suffrage and opposed the legislation, but the CHU was still divided (although its majority preferred householder's suffrage). Because of this Christian dissension, not enough votes were mustered to prevent passage of the legislation on women's representation. Two years later the Chamber discussed giving women suffrage. Again the ARP was unanimously opposed and the CHU divided. Although Christian, the large Catholic caucus voted unanimously in favor of the bill for political reasons. The Liberals and Social-Democrats were also in favor, so the bill granting women suffrage was written in the Statute Book.

Although they did not enthusiastically encourage women to become politically involved, the Christian Historians and the Catholics grudgingly accepted universal suffrage. According to the ARP, however, revolution and godlessness had triumphed. Kuyper's party held onto the idea of householder's suffrage and continued to fiercely oppose the political involvement of women. In 1920 its members established a commission to advise the party whether it was scriptural to allow

women to be nominated as candidates for parliamentary or the provincial and municipal councils. Within a year the commission reported that God had relegated women to a non-political domain and that they should not participate in politics. Subsequently, the ARP continued to refrain from nominating women. Only in 1953 did the heirs of Kuyper recall this decision. In 1963 the first Anti-Revolutionary woman took a seat in the Second Chamber.

From 1917 on, a Christian minority criticized Kuyper's understanding of women and supported Bavinck's interpretation of Scripture. Among Bavinck's supporters were J.Th. de Visser and J.C. Sikkel, both Kuyperian theologians, and C. Smeenk, a politician. A small, highly educated group of neo-Calvinist women was also inspired by Bavinck's arguments: among them A.M. Lindeboom-de Jong, a minister's wife; A.C. Diepenhorst-de Gaay Fortman, married to P.A. Diepenhorst, professor of Law at the Free University and Minister in several coalition-governments; the young teacher and journalist G.H.J. van der Molen, later to become professor of International Law at the Free University; and Johanna Breevoort, a writer. Although these women had once supported the concept of householder's suffrage, the majority decision of Parliament in 1919 caused them to rethink and be influenced by Bavinck's comments. They began to argue that women were wrongly withheld from societal positions for which some of them were exceptionally gifted. Their protests soon ceased, however, when they realized they would meet few or no supporters within the ARP. Although Bavinck's perspective remained a minority viewpoint within the ARP after his death in 1921, the voices of his supporters were not heard until after the second World War. Even after his death in 1920, Kuyper was surrounded by such a sacred glow of memory that serious criticism was prevented for the next thirty years.

What is Kuyper's Legacy?

Let me interject at this point that we have met here some people who to a certain extent might have been subjected to "pain and suffering," as the Princeton resolution put it, as a result of the contro-

versy within the ARP about the right understanding of sex and gender: the neo-Calvinist women who started to protest the Kuyper-led decision of the ARP. These women were scarcely taken seriously. They were not Kuyperian theologians, so who were they to criticize Kuyper's views? In response, the women pointed to Bavinck, the only one on equal footing with Kuyper who presented an alternative still founded on more general, agreed-upon Kuyperian theology. These women felt ostracized by the ARP-decision to refrain from nominating women. From their weak protests, it becomes clear that they must have felt offended and humiliated by their party.

The question, however, is whether Kuyper is to be blamed for the "pain and suffering" of the women and whether the ostracism of women merits such a strong statement. Perhaps the issue was not what the Bible said but the character of the ARP itself. As indicated by the continual discussions within the ARP in the early 1920s, perhaps Kuyper's followers were simply too conservative to admit women into the public domain, regardless of what Kuyperian theology said about it. Furthermore, both Kuyper and Bavinck died shortly before the ARP began to discuss the gender issue in real depth. Even in the last years before their deaths they were physically unable to provide further guidance. Shortly before his death, Kuyper was asked for advice by H. Colijn, his successor as chair of the ARP. Colijn, struggling to hear Kuyper's labored speech, thought he heard Kuyper say that he had changed his mind concerning the right of women to be elected representatives. After all, he reasoned, the ARP believed the rule of a female monarch, Queen Wilhelmina (1898-1948), to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures. The ARP did not take into account this remark of a weak and failing 83-year-old man; rather, its leaders decided to support Kuyper as represented by his earlier thought and described most extensively in his *The Woman's Position of Honor* (1914). Bavinck's 1918 analysis of the issue was also put aside. Kuyper was canonized until the 1950s, at which time new theological research gave preference to Bavinck.⁸

Meanwhile, a younger generation of neo-Calvinist women was fighting to be accepted in the political realm. Among them were F.T. Diemer-

Lindeboom, daughter of A.M. Lindeboom-de Jong who had a Ph.D. in law and was married to a leading Kuyperian, and (again) G.H.J. van der Molen. In 1949 Lindeboom wrote a book, *Man en vrouw in het volle leven*, in which she evaluated the 1921 decision of the ARP that women should not participate in politics. Lindeboom showed respect and understanding for Kuyper, Colijn, and other antirevolutionary leaders. She drew the conclusion, however, that traditionalism and conservatism rather than a thorough study of the Bible had been the main reasons for their decision to deny women the right to stand for elections. When the Bible is read from a Christocentric viewpoint, stressing texts from the New Testament and the meaning of Christ's resurrection, the opposite conclusion can be drawn. Men and women are each other's companion in every field of life, each gifted with personal talents. She stressed that there were antirevolutionary women gifted with political talents who felt a burning desire to spend all their energy and strength to work in politics as a servant for the Lord. She lamented that the ARP had closed that realm to women.

G.H.J. van der Molen was a woman to whom Lindeboom could have been referring. At the end of her life, in the 1950s, she was appointed professor in Law of the Nations at the Vrije Universiteit. She was interested in politics too, but the party, *her* party to which she belonged by conviction, had locked her out. She could not even stand for elections. In 1953 she spoke at the ARP meeting at which the decision of 1921 was undone. With tears in her eyes she told the audience she had been waiting for this decision for 32 years. During all these years her love for the ARP had not died, in spite of its position on women in politics. She rejoiced in the fact that the ARP had changed on this issue.

As a result of both theological study and female activism, the ARP in 1953 recalled the decision of 1921. Many women felt as if, after more than 30 years, justice had prevailed. From their point of view, one of the "shameful distortions of the Gospel present in aspects of Kuyper's writing" had been done away with. From their viewpoint, the words "pain and suffering" would not be too strong to qualify the struggles they endured within the party.

The Princeton Resolution with which we began does not clarify whose "pain and suffering" we are

talking about or when it occurred. In the past? Today? E.g., given what we have covered it becomes clear that talking about the pain of some of the ARP-women also means that we have to speak about the pain of other antirevolutionary party-members in the 1950s. How many were there who considered Kuyper's exegesis to be truly biblical and therefore rejected Bavinck's views as not in accord with the Bible? A coin has two sides. More questions can be raised. Is Kuyper to blame for conclusions his heirs drew from his thought? In discussing the legacy of Kuyper, the Princeton Resolution fails to acknowledge many things.

*The ARP thought that
adopting universal suffrage
would encourage individualism
and deny the communal
basis of the family.*

We have seen that Kuyper's conception of democracy was highly gendered. Except for widows, women did not have the right to take part in the political democratic decision-making process. Men participated in politics as family representatives, as bearers of the (God-given) "rights of the family"; thus even the individual rights of men were tempered by responsibility to the family. We can conclude that Kuyper's pluralism is a pluralism without individual rights, certainly those of women. Kuyper fiercely rejected the French Revolution's goal to protect the individual rights of citizens, for individualism went counter to God's ordinances. Sovereignty belonged not to individual people but to God alone as Creator; humans in humble community were responsible to God and his commands.

Gender in Kuyperian Thought on Sphere Sovereignty

To consider the Kuyperian perspective on gender within the principle of sphere sovereignty, we focus briefly on the political debate over the right of married women to work outside the home.⁹ This debate aroused strong feelings among Kuyperians between 1905 and 1960. A preliminary question was, which sphere should decide the issue: the state or the

family (i.e., a man and his wife)? The heirs of Kuyper did not consider the option that individual women be allowed to make the decision for themselves.

In the early 1910s, Kuyper gave the task of developing a platform on this issue to E.J. Beumer, a high school teacher and future parliamentarian. Beumer concluded that the state should be allowed to decide whether married women could work, because moral values were at stake.¹⁰ In his eyes, women's entrance into the (modern, industrial) labor force was a negative development in the national morality. Adding it to the list of feminism, equality demands, and universal suffrage, Beumer claimed that women working outside the home presented one more danger to the family. To safeguard the family as the Christian foundation of society, the internal structure of the family had to be strengthened. According to the ARP's interpretation of Scripture, this implied that the woman should leave her job and return home to fulfil her proper role as wife and mother; the man must financially support his whole family. First stated in the ARP's election manifesto of 1922, the party aimed to restrict women's work outside the home. The ARP was supported by the conservative Catholic party, the RKSP, whose Catholic basis had led it to a similar policy.

In 1924 the Christian cabinet proposed a bill to limit the work of married women in government. This bill honored the goals of the Catholic and neo-Calvinist parties; it also helped the cabinet, struggling in an economic recession, to cut its administrative expenditures. The three Christian parties warmly welcomed the bill and voted unanimously in favor. The secular Social Democrats and Liberals, on the other hand, argued that the government had no right to interfere in the personal life of individuals or restrict the freedom of women. In a move to protect the equal rights of men and women, these parties united in a veto, but their minority position could not prevent the legislation from being passed. This marked the first successful step of the Christian parties to shape a gendered society corresponding to their religious ideas.

A Christian cabinet continued to preside in government, but the idea of restricting women in the labor force gained more support among the secular parties as the economic crisis deepened in 1929 and

male unemployment increased. In the early 1930s a bill was passed so that, beginning in 1934, women were honorably dismissed from their teaching positions on the day they got married; their jobs were given to unemployed male teachers. Later the ARP, CHU, and RKSP united to pass another bill: on January 1, 1937, all married female teachers were dismissed. (Liberal and Social Democrats argued that this bill was unnecessary because they claimed that hardly any married women teachers remained after 1934.) Stimulated by increasing unemployment rates and convinced that they were acting upon Christian principles, the religious parties continued to fight for further legislation. They wanted to limit women's presence in the labor force to specific "female" jobs in areas of social welfare, health care, housework, and child-rearing. In 1935 a Christian-Liberal cabinet proposed a bill that allowed women to be excluded from office work, predominantly viewed as "male" work. This bill was not passed, because it turned out to be impossible to give a clear definition of which work was intended.

After the general elections of 1937, which were won by the RKSP and the ARP, the Catholics initiated a family politics. The newly formed Christian cabinet appointed the Catholic C.P.M. Romme as Minister of Social Affairs. The day after his inauguration he proposed a bill to discharge all married women from their jobs, except for housekeepers and domestic servants. Since the economic tide had turned for the better, Romme's proposal was motivated not by economic reasons but by the desire to give public voice to Catholic principles. The RKSP and the ARP welcomed the bill with enthusiasm, but the women's movement and employers' organizations offered strong opposition. The women's movement as well as the secular parties objected to the unequal treatment of women. Employers objected because women were cheap laborers (earning far less than men); farmers particularly feared that they would lose women workers essential during harvest time. Surprisingly, the CHU also opposed the bill. They agreed with Romme regarding the role of women in society, but they envisioned the economic problems that would arise if all women were denied work. They feared the crops would not be harvested in time and shopkeepers would get into financial trouble if they had

to do away with the (unpaid) help of their wives and daughters. Another problem was how to police the bill across the nation. That would take too many law enforcement officials!

The CHU joined forces with the opposition, thereby denying the RKSP and the ARP a majority. Romme had to recall his proposal. After the second World War, the Christian parties lost their strong position as the Social Democrats gained power. Also, a shortage of laborers relaxed earlier policies restricting women from working outside the home.

It was not until after the war that Kuyperians began to question the right of the state in this issue: should not the family—or even the woman herself—decide whether a woman should work? Until the late 1940s, Kuyperians did not consider the individual rights of women. They did not consider that a woman's rights might be violated by restricting her role by law to that of housewife and mother. They argued rather that laws of this kind liberated women from carrying a double burden—work in the home and work in society—and enabled them to dedicate themselves fully to the family where they truly belonged. Only after the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948 did Kuyperians openly begin to recognize the weaknesses of their previous position.

Taking Kuyper's conceptions of sphere sovereignty and women's role in society as starting points, his followers had developed a labor-policy by which women were given a fixed role in society, namely that of housewife and mother in the family. Part of the policy was that it was the *state* that gave women their clearly defined role. Women were not allowed the individual freedom to choose their own roles, except within the limited sphere of the family. But things began to change and after 1950 the case for individual rights and equal treatment of men and women gained strength.

Kuyper's Pluralism and Present-day Multiculturalism

We have discussed Kuyper's influence on the gender debate in the Netherlands. Now we turn to a comparison of his pluralism with late twentieth-century multiculturalism. Based on Kuyper's conception of gender roles, we can make three distinctions.

First, Kuyper assigned men and women to different spheres, that is, men to the public sphere and women to the private.¹¹ Modern multiculturalism, on the contrary, rejects such assignments. It emphasizes instead such aspects as equality and proportional representation, or affirmative action, to guarantee that the voices of "minorities" are heard in the dominant societal groups. It strives not to assign people to different spheres but rather to integrate and represent all people in all areas

Kuyper's pluralism is a pluralism without individual rights, certainly those of women.... Sovereignty belonged not to individual people but to God alone.

of society without obliterating their individual identities.

Second, Kuyper rejected the concept of individual political rights for men and women alike. According to the principle of householder's suffrage political rights were given to the family as a whole. Men were required to represent their households and as such they were given political voice. Women, except widows, were not allowed to speak up for themselves or for the family in the public domain. In contrast, individual rights form the basis for present-day multiculturalism. Equal treatment regardless of gender and sex or of race and ethnicity has become a sacred value. Ever since the Declaration of Human Rights was signed by the United Nations in 1948, the momentum has changed into the direction of a positive appreciation of individual rights.

Third, in certain circumstances, as the Christian labor-policy of the 1920s and 1930s indicates, Kuyper's followers believed that it was within their neo-Calvinist convictions to make use of the state as a (God given) instrument to re-model family-life into the direction Kuyper thought to be in accordance with the Bible. So, the state confined married women to their believed-appropriate sphere, forbidding them to enter the labor market.

Compared with multiculturalism this would mean that the state could impose certain political measures upon certain groups of people in society on the basis of religious arguments. Unlike the in 1930s, few people in today's secularized Dutch society would accept this political platform.

The above points demonstrate why Kuyper's pluralism cannot be equated with multiculturalism. Kuyper's ideal pluralist society would have looked quite different from an ideal multicultural society of the late twentieth century. It is difficult to say, however, whether it is good or bad that Kuyper's pluralism differs from multiculturalism. We have to take into account the time period and the societal structures in which Kuyper came to his thought and that are quite different from our individualistic postmodern era. Kuyper formulated a response to the societal problems of his days. Present-day society has to deal with aspects Kuyper could not even think of, for example, issues of equal rights, race and ethnicity, and gender and sex. Thus, in the first place, Kuyper has to be evaluated as a historical person who was a child of his days. There are certain central elements in Kuyper's thinking, however, that can make a positive contribution in current debates. Most important of these, as I see it, is his positive evaluation of a society that consists of minorities of whatever kind or structure. Kuyper not only was able to justify the existence of each of these but also to show their contribution towards a society in which social justice and mutual respect prevail. Kuyper's positive, pluralist view on society has kept its value. This constructive way of thinking can be helpful in answering the difficult questions of our multicultural society today.

END NOTES

1. Peter Schurman, "Profound regrets voiced about Kuyper's prejudices," *Christian Courier* 13 March 1998: 2.
2. Bert Witvoet, "How profoundly do I regret Kuyper's limitations?" *Christian Courier* 13 March 1998: 4.
3. Hillie van de Streek, "De vrouw zwigge in gemeente!? Een traditie van 19 eeuwen," *Op haar plaats? 13 vrouwen over hun positie in kerk en maatschappij* (Christelijk Studiecentrum ICS: Amsterdam, 16 april 1992) 55-64. The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) started a discussion on women in the early 1920's shortly after Kuyper's death.
4. In this section I rely in part on H.J. van de Streek, H.-M. Th.D. ten Napel, and R.S. Zwart, "Tegen de ordeningen Gods. Sekse en kiesrecht in de christelijke politiek," *Christelijke politiek en democratie* (SDU: Den Haag, 1995) 97-127.
5. In 1984, the ARP split into two parties; the old ARP headed by Kuyper, and a Christian Historical group led by Jhr. Mr. A.F. de Savorin Lohman. In 1908 the Christian Historians established the Christian Historical Union (CHU). In 1980 the Catholic People's Party (KVP), ARP, and CHU merged to form the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).
6. Herman Bavinck, First Chamber of the States General, in: J.B. Kan, *Handelingen over de Herziening de Grondwet III* (s-Gravenhage, 1916) 102-105.
7. Abraham Kuyper, "Het vrouwenkiesrecht voor Gods Woord" I, II, III *De Standard* 19, 20, and 21 June 1916.
8. *Rapport van de antirevolutionaire commissie inzake de verkiesbaarheid van der vrouw*, 1949 (ARP: Den Haag z.j. [1952]); N.J. Hommes, *De Vrouw in de kerk, nieuw-testamentische perspectieven* (Franeker 1951); G. Huls, *De dienst de vrouw in de kerk* (Bosch en keuning: Baarn, 1951).
9. For this part of my paper I rely on the fifth chapter of my Ph.D. thesis on Gender and Christian politics in the Netherlands, 1890-1960.
10. E.J. Beumer, *Het voorgestelde ontslag van vrouwelijke Rijksambtenaren en onderwijzeressen* (G.J.A. Ruys: Utrecht, 1910).
11. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Kuyper conference, Princeton, NJ, February 1998.
12. An example of this is the clamor that arose in the Dutch mass media and among feminists when the orthodox-Calvinist political party of the SGP in 1993 denied women the right to party membership on neo-Calvinist theological grounds.