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## Clear Eyes, Full Hearts: A Review of Calvinism for a Secular Age

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## Clear Eyes, Full Hearts: A Review of Calvinism for a Secular Age

### Abstract

"The authors invite us to know what it is like to live and work within a tradition that has significant flaws alongside profound insights."

Posting about the book *Calvinism for a Secular Age* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

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# Clear Eyes, Full Hearts: A Review of *Calvinism for a Secular Age*

Gayle Doornbos

February 8, 2022

**Title:** *Calvinism for a Secular Age: A Twenty-First-Century Reading of Abraham Kuyper's Stone Lectures*

**Author:** Jessica R. Joustra, Robert J. Joustra

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“Clear eyes, full hearts, can’t lose.” It’s the rallying cry of the Dillon Panthers, the fictional football team from the TV show *Friday Night Lights*. Meant to encourage the team and remind them how the game should be played, it’s a memorable and powerful feature of the show. Reading *Calvinism for a Secular Age*, I could not help but come away thinking about how well the cry from *Friday Night Lights* captures what the book offers. Edited by Robert and Jessica Joustra, *Calvinism for a Secular Age* brings together scholars from multiple fields who invite us to consider Abraham Kuyper’s legacy and relevance for today. Using Kuyper’s Stone Lectures on Calvinism (given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898) as an introductory guide to Kuyper’s vision of Christianity, each chapter summarizes what Kuyper said, what Kuyperians did, and what they should do.

## Clear Eyes:

What arises from the approach taken by *Calvinism and a Secular Age* is at least two kinds of clarity. The first is clarity concerning Kuyper’s all-encompassing, capacious, and constructive vision of Christianity. Kuyper presents a Christianity that is enmeshed in creational life. For Kuyper, Calvinism’s unique contrition is that it presents a life-encompassing vision of Christianity that refuses to reduce Christianity to soteriological categories. In the able hands of the contributors to this volume, the insights and central components of Kuyper’s thought are clearly presented, providing guidance for newcomers to Kuyper.

The second is clarity concerning Kuyper’s faults, complexities, and limitations. While the editors and authors all inhabit the Neo-Calvinist tradition that flows from Kuyper, none of them

approach Kuyper or his influence with rose-colored glasses. Ready to look at Kuyper's faults and blind spots with clear eyes, this is no hagiography. Rather, it is an open and honest assessment, acknowledging that Kuyper and his vision had serious flaws and limitations that, at times, have caused immense harm to those following in his wake. This has a profound effect. The authors invite us to know what it is like to live and work within a tradition that has significant flaws alongside profound insights. By honestly assessing Kuyper, we are presented with what anyone working within a tradition needs: a model for engagement that neither demonizes nor exalts its past luminaries, but seeks to understand, critique, and develop the tradition.

### **Full Hearts:**

While *Calvinism for a Secular Age* primarily introduces readers to Kuyper's thought and seeks to identify his relevance for today, it does not reduce Kuyper's vision to an intellectual one. Rather, at various points, it highlights how Kuyper's affirmation of Christ's Lordship over all of creation and call for Christian engagement in every aspect of life grows out of a relationship with God. In Jessica Joustra's conclusion and Richard Mouw's chapter, "Kuyper and Life Systems," the centrality of Kuyper's piety and his refusal to bifurcate the head and the heart, public life and intimacy with God, 'worldviewing and spiritual meditation' is identified.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Kuyper's vision of Christianity is one of full heads and full hearts.

While clearly mentioned throughout the volume, it is one aspect of the book that I wish was more thoroughly treated. The lack of a chapter on Kuyper's piety makes sense given that the primary framework for the book is Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*. However, I do hope the strong, clear statements on Kuyper's piety entice readers to pursue learning more about his meditations and spirituality as the fuel for engagement in every sphere of life. One of the unfortunate legacies of Kuyper's reception in North America is that it has often been lopsided, recognizing his worldviewing and culture engaging side and leaving the piety of his meditations on the other side of the Atlantic. In other words, North American reception has often focused on Christ's Lordship over 'every square inch,' while forgetting that the square inch of the soul is vital to Kuyper's vibrant vision of Christianity.

### **Can't Lose:**

Finally, *Calvinism for a Secular Age* invites its readers to consider a different definition of what it means to "win." As highlighted in the book, Kuyper tended towards world-affirming optimism and utilized militaristic language to describe the mortal battle between Christianity and modernism. Taken in a certain direction, these threads in Kuyper can be twisted into a triumphalist narrative that defines itself through 'winning' ideological and cultural battles and proclaims an over-realized eschatology. What arises from *Calvinism for a Secular Age*, however, is a different picture. First, as each author unpacks what Kuyperians did, a complex realistic narrative arises that challenges any airs of triumphalism that may remain. This is a tradition with a history that is beautiful *and* broken. It is a tradition that has a glorious, generative and broad vision for the Christian, but it is one that is imperfect. And it is a vision that, after one

hundred years, does not offer perfect, predetermined answers to contemporary problems. Rather, as the authors show in their sections on “what should we do,” this is a tradition that continues to call Christians to enter into the messiness of contemporary life and wrestle with what it means to be faithful to Christ in every aspect of their lives.

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1. J. Joustra, “Conclusion,” *Calvinism for a Secular Age*, 202.