
Editor's Notes

When I began planning this issue it was intended to focus on the social implications of the gospel. But although several of the articles and reviews touch on the original theme, others range more broadly.

If anyone was concerned for the social and cultural implications of the gospel it was the great Dutch theologian, churchman and statesman **Abraham Kuyper** (1837-1920). This year is the centenary of Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered on the Stone Foundation at Princeton Theological Seminary. Anyone who has read those lectures cannot but be impressed by the scope and depth of Kuyper's cultural and social vision. Kuyper was a colossus of a man who fitted into one life what several other great men would have been satisfied with. He was a Dutch Reformed pastor who founded two Christian newspapers (which he edited), a Calvinist university, a Christian political party, a denomination and a Christian school system, as well as writing a number of theological and devotional books and becoming prime minister of the Netherlands. Kuyper was convinced that Calvinistic Christianity must not be confined to the church, but rather had to become a culturally formative influence in every sphere of life. One of his best-known sayings is that "There is not a single inch of the whole terrain of our human existence over which Christ ... does not proclaim, 'Mine!'" His influence has been immense, not only in the Netherlands but more recently in the thinking of people such as Francis Schaeffer, Hans Rookmaaker, Rousas Rushdooney, Cornelius van Til and many others.

In *Creating a Christian Worldview* (Paternoster, 1998) **Peter S Heslam** gives us an excellent commentary on the lectures. He begins by putting Kuyper in his historical and theological context. There is some very interesting material here on Kuyper's relationship with BB Warfield and the differences between them on apologetics and science. The two theologians respectively represent the presuppositionalist and evidentialist strands in Reformed thinking and yet they had a warm regard for each other. Heslam then moves on to examining each of the six lectures. The book is very stimulating and full of good things. What is striking is how Kuyper saw Calvinism as not only a theological system, but also a life-system or world-view (the subject of the first lecture) that stood in antithesis to its contemporary rivals – enlightenment modernism, pantheism and evolutionism. Here it is fascinating to see how Kuyper's critique anticipated what many Christians are saying today with the onset of postmodernism. After his conversion Kuyper was tempted and burned by the higher-life movement which, after a breakdown, he rejected for a robust confessional Calvinism that was not ashamed to stake its claims in the public square. In subsequent lectures he dealt with religion, politics, science (by which he meant knowledge in its widest sense), art and the future. In these lectures some of Kuyper's great themes – sphere sovereignty, common grace, antithesis – reappear as he sought to put flesh on his great vision of a Calvinistic culture. Always in the background was the spectre of the French Revolution, which to Kuyper was the epitome of autonomous man's attempt to throw off the rule of God.

In terms of social theology Kuyper falls within the Christian Democratic tradition in European politics. This tradition has never taken root in Great Britain or North America.

Heslam does not really explore why this has been the case. In part it has to be due to the pervasive influence of Protestantism in the Anglo-Saxon world and the absence of the strong anti-clericalism that so much affected continental political Liberalism. In Britain evangelicals have adopted an accomodationist approach to politics, education and many other fields, whereas in Holland Calvinists have traditionally sought to establish separate confessional institutions. In some measure this was necessary simply because of the fragmented nature of Dutch society. In his thinking about the pluriformity of society and the role of common grace Kuyper provided a theoretical foundation for this development that was worked out practically in his political involvement. No one could ever accuse Kuyper of being an ivory tower theologian.

Although some of Kuyper's writings are available in English there is much that is not and therefore it is a pleasure to read *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Paternoster, 1998), edited by Professor James Bratt of Calvin College, Michigan. The book contains a small selection from Kuyper's voluminous writings covering a wide range of his interests, including his remarkable personal memoir *Confidentially* (1873) in which he writes of his conversion (in part through an Anglo-Catholic novel by Charlotte Yonge given to him by his fiancée!). The pieces are infused with the passion and clarity that helps us understand why Kuyper had such an immense and devoted following among ordinary people. I found two pieces particularly enjoyable. Kuyper's 1891 address to the annual convention of the Antirevolutionary Party, *Maranatha*, summarises his political theology as it interacted with new political opportunities and choices. Perhaps the most remarkable piece is an address the following year entitled *The Blurring of the Boundaries*. Here Kuyper critiques contemporary European culture by using the concept of pantheism.

It seems to me that Christians today need to recover this big vision for the world. In many ways our task is more difficult since the church in Europe is much weaker than in Kuyper's day, society more complex and the Christian foundations of our culture more eroded. Nevertheless we must work to recapture the cultural high ground. If we don't, Christianity will be relegated to the margins and to an inner spiritual domain and we will see our culture becoming increasingly godless. We will also be much weaker in the face of a religion with a very comprehensive worldview, namely Islam. Of course a well thought out and worked out Christian worldview is not everything. But we can also learn from Kuyper as a man of action as well as a thinker. In his day Kuyper saw the need for Christians to separate themselves organisationally from the surrounding culture in order to establish strong institutions that would in turn transform society. Can we not learn something here? For example, has not the time come for the establishment of alternative Christian institutions of higher education, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, so that Christian thinking can be developed? Or is there not a place for developing a system of Christian schools?

But Kuyper understood that developing a Christian worldview and strategy was not enough. He spent much effort in writing articles and books that would nurture devotion and promote godliness. As a young minister he was powerfully influenced towards vital confessional orthodoxy by the pious Reformed people of his parish. He never lost his concern for vital godliness, but equally he refused to confine this spirituality to the heart or the church. For Kuyper, Jesus was King of every sphere of life in his world and the Christian's duty is to work to see that Kingship acknowledged.