



# THE KUYPER NEWSLETTER

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## KUYPER AND HERMAN BAVINCK (1)

The renaissance of Dutch Calvinism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was of course dominated by the magisterial figure of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). In providing the theological leadership for that renaissance, however, Kuyper was more than matched by his younger colleague Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). Consequently their influence on the further development of Dutch Calvinism differed significantly. As G.C. Berkouwer has noted: "Kuyper's influence worked through the development of the Philosophy of the Law-Idea. But Bavinck raised theological questions that continued to play a crucial role in mainstream theology after he had gone" (A Half Century of Theology, p. 13).

In many respects Bavinck stands in the shadow of Kuyper. Both age and temperament were factors here. When Bavinck was still a theological student at Kampen and Leiden (in the 1870's), Kuyper was already deeply involved in the ecclesiastical and political wars he so thrived on. Bavinck was a more irenic figure, considerate and appreciative of opponents in a way that often irked Kuyper. On one occasion, disturbed by Bavinck's sympathetic (though not uncritical) treatment of the ethical theologian Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, Kuyper called on Bavinck to be more prophetic and angry and less urbane. In a letter to Kuyper, Bavinck gave a characteristic reply: "In polemic a soft answer is also often needed."

The two men also differed in their scholarly method. The Dutch homiletician T. Hoekstra, himself one of Bavinck's students, characterized the difference between the two men thus: "Bavinck's was an Aristotelian, Kuyper's a Platonic spirit; Bavinck the man of clear concepts, Kuyper the man of sparkling ideas; Bavinck built on empirical, historical givens, Kuyper speculated with intuitively grasped thoughts; Bavinck was primarily an inductive thinker; Kuyper primarily deductive."

While these more or less external and formal differences were already apparent to their contemporaries, that there may have been significant differences in the content of their thought was not always so apparent. Even as late as 1955 Bastian Kruithof in his dissertation on Bavinck (The Relation of Christianity and Culture in the Teaching of Herman Bavinck) could write: "In their maturity, the fundamental convictions of the two men were the same" (p. 12).

The assumption that Bavinck was little more than a "more mild, deliberate, and peaceful reflection of Abraham Kuyper" was sharply criticized by Eugene Heideman. He notes,

however, that this view "is not surprising and perhaps even excusable in the light of the friendship which existed between the two men, the overpowering figure of Kuyper, and the superficial similarity of their thought" (The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck, 1959, p. 6).

In fact, a serious scholarly discussion of important theological differences between the two men did not see the light until 40 years after Bavinck's death with the publication of R.H. Bremmer's dissertation, Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus.

In subsequent issues of this newsletter we shall consider some of these differences.

--John Bolt, Calvin College

#### KUYPER IN MICHIGAN, 1898

On October 27, 1898 Abraham Kuyper arrived in Grand Rapids where he began a speaking tour which took him to the Dutch-American communities of Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Ohio. At each specific destination local arrangement committees planned festive banquets and rented large auditoriums to accommodate Kuyper's admirers. Reports indicate that every speech attracted capacity crowds. In Grand Rapids, despite an admission fee of twenty-five cents, the number swelled to two-thousand two-hundred. In the "Furniture City," Kuyper encountered many of his most ardent American disciples, and he commented that, while he could scarcely discover the vestigial roots of orthodox Calvinism on the Eastern Seaboard, in Grand Rapids he not only observed the roots, branches, and leaves of Geneva, but abundant fruit as well.

No wonder, for his interlude in the city was a virtual love feast. The seminary students of the Christian Reformed Church greeted his arrival at the school's door with three boisterous hurrahs, and sang American folk songs to entertain him. Abel Brink, the student body's President, pointed to the wide admiration and use of Kuyper's publications within the Seminary, and its President, Gerrit E. Boer, introduced the honored guest in superlatives. After Kuyper responded to these introductions with short complimentary remarks, the whole student body, fifty strong, lined up to shake his hand and they rejoined, their voices singing, "Jehovah Bless Thee From Above," as the Kuyper entourage left for tea at the home of Professor Henrikus Beuker.

Even Beuker, who had crossed swords quite sharply with Kuyper in the Netherlands some twelve years earlier, was unrestrained in his compliments when he presented Kuyper to the Grand Rapids audience in Lockerby Hall. They heard a rousing 90-minute oration from the "Champion of Calvinism," and received it with wild enthusiasm.

In this and every other speech which he delivered to Dutch-American audiences, Kuyper urged the folk to join forces with the best elements of American society, following the practice of tulip farmers who used two exemplary strains of the flower to create a third and better product. But he also announced the formation of an international organization, the "Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond," with chapters in South Africa, Argentina, East India and wherever the Dutch had migrated. Through this institutional channel he hoped the transport of Netherlandic culture and language would maintain a vital sense of cohesion among some nine million widely scattered sons and daughters of the Low Country.

Dutch-Americans on the Eastern Seaboard and throughout the Mid-West appointed committees to participate in Kuyper's grand cultural objectives, and the Western Michigan group was particularly anxious to advance the teaching of Dutch language and literature on a professional level. The concern to improve the level of Dutch language skills among Michigan's immigrants stemmed largely from the region's encounter with Kuyper. For, though his popular lectures--those which he delivered at Lockerby Hall in Grand Rapids and at the New City Hotel in Holland, Michigan--elicited thunderous applause and enthusiastic acclaim in the press, his scholarly and more serious efforts were barely understood. After his lecture on "The Future of Calvinism," which he delivered at the Third Reformed Church in Holland, a good portion of the audience complained that they could not understand the professor's language. Subsequently, the Michigan committee of the International Organization determined that the appointment of qualified instructors in Dutch language and literature should receive high priority. Ultimately both Hope College and Calvin College did appoint such teachers to achieve the committee's goals, and especially Calvin College and Seminary, with its persisting attachment to Dutch theology, has maintained a vigorous Dutch language program.

Kuyper's Western tour, continued to Iowa (Pella, Orange City), Chicago and Cleveland, where he stopped on his return to New York, engendered a renewal of ethnic pride throughout "Dutch-America". Of his three-day visit and his English-language speech to the Cleveland audience, A. Van Den Heuvel reported simply "These three days were unforgettable".

Still, the Western tour was not Kuyper's primary objective in visiting the United States, because his specific assignment was to deliver six lectures on Calvinism at Princeton's Theological Seminary, printed in 1931 as Calvinism. After Princeton, he returned to the Netherlands, and the political wars which were soon to make him Prime Minister.

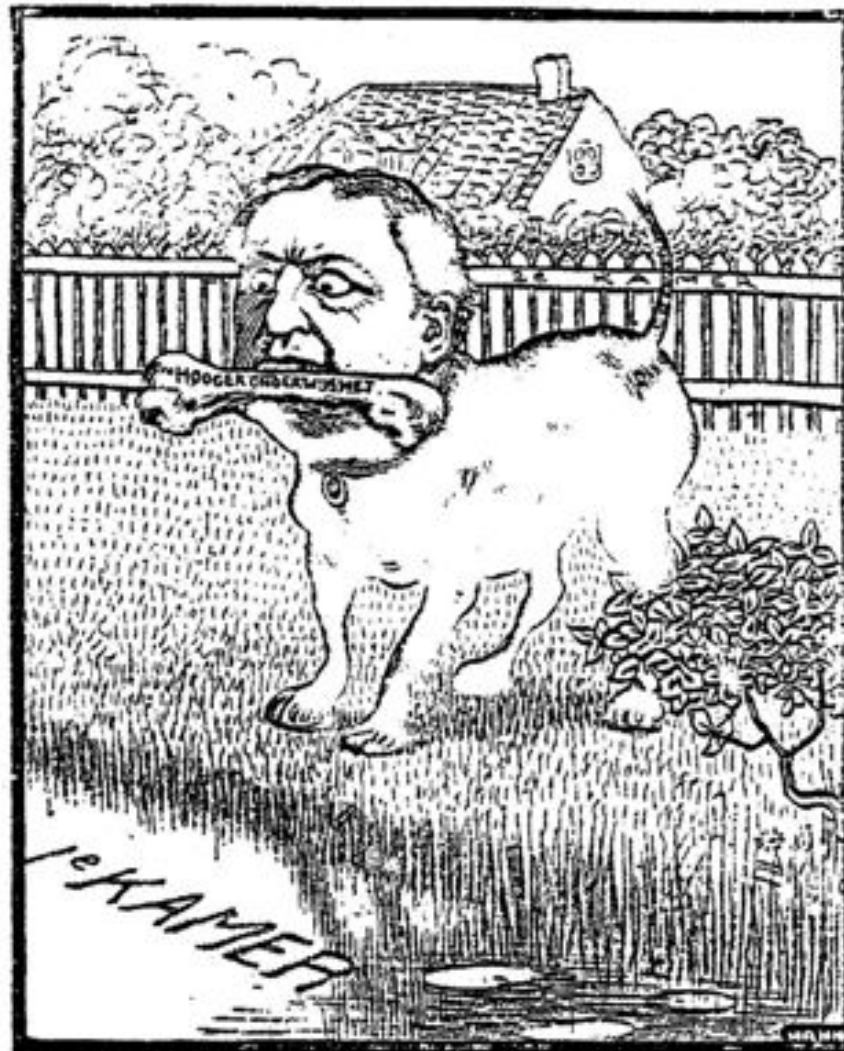
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Gereformeerde Amerikaan, November 1898, pp 447-463; De Wachter ,  
Nov. 2, Nov. 23, Dec. 7, 1898; Holland City News, October 28,  
Nov. 4, Nov. 18, 1898. For background, cf. Henry Lucas, Netherlanders in  
America (Ann Arbor, 1955): 593-598, and D.W. Jellema, "Kuyper's Visit to  
America in 1898," Michigan History 42 (1958): 227-237.

--Herb Brinks, Calvin College

Note: An expanded version will appear in Brinks, et al., "A Time to Keep," a history of the Christian Reformed Church, which will include a treatment of Kuyperian influence therein.

Fidel met de Kluif  
 ("Fido with his Bone")



April 10, 1904

Kuyper's many-sided personality and colorful career gave political cartoonists a lot to work with. At their hands Kuyper was repeatedly lampooned as a man of many faces, many masks, many images. A ball-and-chain impeding progress; a shipwreck endangering traffic on the high seas of Dutch society; a dark moon eclipsing sunshine over the House of Orange; a demonic ghost coming back to haunt the liberal establishment. In this cartoon we meet him as the dogged canine clinging tenaciously to his bone of contention.

At stake, as Kuyper saw it, was the issue of justice, freedom, and equity in education. The year is 1904, toward the close of his prime-ministership. Since 1880 he had exploited the "school struggle" to galvanize his following, to strengthen the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and to create a common-cause coalition with Roman Catholic political forces. The fundamental principle advocated by Kuyper was freedom of choice in education, without financial penalty, for all faith-communities in The Netherlands.



It was a long, enervating, uphill battle. Not until 1920, the year of Kuyper's death, was final victory achieved.

The scenario depicted in this "Fido with his Bone" cartoon represents one phase in the unfolding drama. Kuyper is pictured in "bull-doggish" fashion trying to maneuver the "Higher Education Act" bill through parliament. Apparently his dogged prowess enable him to hurdle the first obstacle--the fence in the background, marked "Second Chamber" ("Lower House"). But now he faces the watery challenge of navigating his way across the canal marked "First Chamber" ("Upper House"). There a Liberal majority stands ready to frustrate his plans.

How did Kuyper's cause fare? The ensuing parliamentary debates elicited some of the prime minister's most memorable pölicital speeches. In them he contrasted what he pictures as the allegedly neutral, yet in fact highly dogmatic stance of secular educators with the forthrightly confessional, pluralist view of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, rooted in the principles of a biblically-reformed world-and-life view. It came down, he said, to an encounter between Christianity and Enlightenment-based Liberalism. In this crucial confrontation Kuyper's ideas of "common grace" and "anti-thesis" in tandem come into sharp focus as theological groundwork for articulating public policy.

The outcome? The passage of this higher education bill in 1905 was a high point in Kuyper's career. It marks the achievement of one of his major societal goals: the liberation of university education, which he saw as an important step in the direction of a more free society, a more just state, and a more equitable school system.

Gordon J. Spykman, Calvin College

#### HENRICUS BEUKER AND KUYPER

J.A. De Jong, "Henricus Beuker and De Vrije Kerk on Abraham Kuyper and the Free University," pp. 27-64 in Building the House: Essays on Christian Education, edited by James A. De Jong and Louis Y. Van Dyke (Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 1981). Price \$5.95. 153 pp.

De Vrije Kerk was begun in 1875 as an Afscheiding publication aimed at leaders in that movement. It was designed to articulate and to propagate Afscheiding principles and ideas. While it contains much ecclesiastical and theological material, it includes a surprising amount on social, cultural and political matters as well. Beuker, the main editor, watched Kuyper's work with intense interest and general support. While he and many fellow Afscheiding ministers endorsed the idea of a Reformed university in the early 1870's, they differed from Kuyper in that they advocated a closer relationship between any eventual university and the church. With Kuyper they regarded theology as vital to the healthy development of a Reformed university in the Netherlands, although Kuyper thought theology could function at a university independent of church control. While he was unsuccessful in his attempt to wed Kuyper's emerging university to the Afscheiding churches, Beuker endorsed the founding of the school. In the 1890's Beuker immigrated to America, taught at Calvin Seminary, and was a founder of the influential journal De Gereformeerde Amerikaan.

--James De Jong, Dordt College

ON KUYPER AS EVANGELICAL LEADER

Richard F. Lovelance, in a recent plea for evangelical renewal (The Dynamics of Spiritual Life, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1979) notes in passing the Dutch experience (p. 181):

"...one of the few parts of the church which was still intelligently seeking the biblical-cultural synthesis dreamed of by Comenius and Edwards was one which was still feeling the impact of the Revival, the European outgrowth of the Second Awakening and the Prayer Revival of 1858. At the end of the 19th century, the great Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper, inaugurated a tradition of theological integration which took seriously both the...antithesis between redeemed and unredeemed thinking-- and common grace...--God's blessing of all men, converted and unconverted alike, with gifts of truth and beauty and ethical value.... While Kuyper himself incorporated a powerful experiential core in his theological outlook, the later Amsterdam School has sometimes been hampered by an incipient aversion to Christian experience, the effect of the reaction in Dutch Christianity against the excesses of Dutch Puritanism. This may explain why the movement has so far failed to have the impact and the growth associated with intellectual leaders in the Awakening tradition such as Comenius, Francke, Edwards, and Dwight....(but) it is not hard to imagine what a powerful intellectual force would be released in Western culture if the Reformed orthodox community...would recover the dynamics of renewal which characterized the earlier awakenings."

--Joel Carpenter, Trinity College

NOTES AND QUERIES

107. Michael Walzer, besides being a noted historian of the Puritan Revolution, presently working at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, is known as an able "socialist radical" (small 's'). His current Radical Principles (1981, Basic Books) is a collection of essays on social topics, articulating his credo. He attacks Liberalism, in both its 19th-century laissez-faire version and its current welfare state variant, as in serious question: "the crisis of liberal civilization." Its ideals of individualism, secularism and toleration have produced moral chaos and social disintegration. What lies "beyond the welfare state?" A new politics is necessary -- stressing democratic decentralization, more power in the hands of local groups, a return to morality in private life and politics. Jean Strouse (Newsweek 1/26/81) feels that Walzer "poses questions most people quit thinking about ten years ago" and "is a vital tonic for the 80's." What is curious about Walzer's vision is its similarity in many points (though obviously by no means all!) to that of Kuyper (and for that matter, of the current ARP to some extent); anti-Liberalism, anti-secularism, a version of "sphere sovereignty," etc. What is lacking is Kuyper's fervent Christianity.
108. -- A.P. Staalman was a maverick Antirevolutionary, representing the rough dock workers of Den Helder, who finally went into opposition against Kuyper's 1901 cabinet as "too slow" in pushing for instant universal suffrage and instant Christian school subsidies, and ran on a "Christian Democrat" ticket, which

siphoned away enough votes to help bring about Kuyper's slim loss in the 1904 elections. His main side-kick was another maverick, Timon De Vries, a firey ARP leader in Groningen. Around 1912, a Timon De Vries, who had been in Dutch politics and broken with Kuyper, taught briefly at Calvin College. Is this the same man? What were the later careers of Staalman and De Vries? Would be glad for any information.

109. Ernst Troeltsch (d. 1923), in his classic 1911 Social Thought of the Christian Churches (tr. 1931, Olive Wyon: Macmillan), has an extensive treatment of Calvinism as a watershed in the development of modern Western civilization, and also treats Kuyper briefly, as a notable Neo-Calvinist leader whose "manifesto of modern Calvinism" combines the ideas of Calvin with natural-law ideas. He notes K's stress on the free church (but disagrees re. K's attempt at deriving it from C's essential ideas). The combination of Calvin and natural-law ideas (or, of common grace ideas) briefly defines, for T, "Neo-Calvinism." Thus also K's admiration for Gladstone is explicable, for the same combination occurs there. So also K's favorable view of the USA as the home of a free-church tradition, and K's admiration for the natural-law elements in the Declaration of Independence. (See Troeltsch, pp. 660, 676, and lengthy footnotes). While T's treatment of Neo-Calvinism is not profound (he uses primarily K's Calvinism (Stone Lectures) of 1898 -- he does try to put K in perspective, in an interesting and provocative fashion.
110. Christian journalist Jon Kennedy's decade-old "Kuyper Institute," loosely associated with Stanford, and publisher of the monthly New Reformation, can now offer graduate degrees at a master's level, via Valley Christian University (Fresno). Some 15 courses are available. The Institute's name derives from K's work as a notable Christian journalist.

--DWJ

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON MATERIALS IN ENGLISH

35. JJP Durand, "The Prophetic Task of the Church Vis a`Vis the State" Prophetic Witness in a Bewildered World (Mission Conference Papers); Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1981 (held at Nimes in France). Provocative comparison of K and Barth on this point.
36. R. McCarthy, D. Oppewal, W. Peterson, G. Spykman, Society, State, and Schools, A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism. Grand Rapids (Eerdmans) 1981. Includes able use of K's views on freedom of education to bolster a plea for drastic reforms in educational funding.

Contributions to Bibliographical Notes welcome.

--DWJ

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