

Review of Craig G Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction*

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1. Author Profile

Craig G Bartholomew is a South African theologian working abroad and is the H Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ontario. He is also the dean of the St Georges Centre for Biblical and Public Theology. In addition, he serves on the adjunct faculty at Trinity College, Bristol. He has authored a number of books including: *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (2015), *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (2014), co-authored with Michael W Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (2013), co-authored with Michael W Goheen, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (2011), The Baker Commentary, *Ecclesiastes* (2009).

About the Author¹

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¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

2. Background to the Book

It has been said that we are living in a ‘Kuyperian moment’, not to mention the recent translation of Herman Bavinck’s 4-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, his *Reformed Ethics* under translation, and Abraham Kuyper’s 12-volume *Collected Works in Public Theology* nearing the end of its translation and publication. Some, like Bartholomew and myself, argue that in this fragile age of ours, the Kuyperian tradition may offer resources for discovering constructive ways that may defuse some of the major threats we face in our world, and yet also bring renewed life to the church, promoting human flourishing. In his life and theology, Kuyper was proactive in contextualising the Christian faith in whatever new situation it might find itself. To that end, Bartholomew begins by orienting the reader to the current context of our modern or postmodern world a hundred years after Abraham Kuyper. Interestingly, being South African, he also starts off by setting the book in the South African context, the problems of Apartheid and today’s current political and socio-economic concerns.

3. Summary of the Book

Introduction: Seeking the Welfare of the City

While Bartholomew argues that religion is needed by healthy politics and the nation, in South Africa the relationship between politics and Christianity has had a troubled past, despite producing the likes of Desmond Tutu. He reminds us that many Christians, notably Reformed Christians, used Christianity to promote apartheid. It is for this reason that Reformed Christianity often lacks credibility in South Africa, so Bartholomew says.

The introduction to this chapter poses the challenge that Christianity can be part of the solution, and that South Africa, and other nations, are desperate for the church to find ways to bring about *shalom* in the future.

Abraham Kuyper sought to give expression to the notion that the role of authentic Christianity is to alert people to the universal reign of God, demonstrating ‘what it means to follow Christ in every sphere of life’ (Bartholomew 2017:100). Yet, while there are concerns about Kuyper’s views on racial purity,² his thought and the theological tradition that flows from him offer rich resources for Christians of every race in their faithfulness to their God-given calling to be ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world’.

² Nevertheless, in an obscure footnote, Bartholomew mentions a powerful anecdote, a conversation between John Bolt, an American-Dutch Reformed theologian who translated Herman Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* into English as *Reformed Dogmatics*, and the late great Ghanaian theologian of Christianity in Africa, Kwame Bediako. After hearing Bediako describe the chaotic political condition of West Africa and after having watched documentaries on Thomas Jefferson, Bolt asked Bediako whether West Africa was in urgent need of its own Thomas Jefferson. Bediako smiled and replied, ‘What Africa needs even more today is its own Abraham Kuyper’ (Bartholomew 2017:10-11); For an example of Kuyper’s racial views, cf. Kuyper’s *Stone Lectures on Calvinism*, (1905), pp. 32, 84, and 196. In response cf. Strauss (1996), and Jooste (2013), esp. p 245.

This book aims to offer an analysis of the systematic contours of Kuyper's thought, along with that of his followers, in order that we, today, might learn from the Kuyperian tradition.

Chapter 1: Abraham Kuyper's Conversion

No doubt, Abraham Kuyper's achievements were extraordinary! He was a pastor, a fine theologian, a political activist, a leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in Holland, prime minister, co-founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, a prolific journalist, an author of a good number of books, and a church reformer. Yet, he was critical of the kind of Christianity in which he grew up. Despite being a student of theology, his real interests were in literature, and he denied the eternal deity of Christ, insisting rather that Jesus was only a man, and was generally theologically unorthodox. But it was reading the British novel of 1853, *The Heir of Redclyffe* by Charlotte Yonge, that, as Kuyper retells it, broke his 'smug, rebellious heart' and brought him to his knees, pulling him into the kingdom of God. And in his first sermon, he emphasized how fellowship with God is 'the highest aspiration of the human heart' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:19). It was also during this conversion that Kuyper began to rediscover the theology of John Calvin. After an account of Kuyper's conversion, the chapter continues to describe his reaction to modernism, which he took as a kind of realism, but one which quickly becomes materialism. He compares it to the historic challenge of Arianism, which in the end only made the Church stronger having overcome it. Evidently, without his conversion, he would have never achieved all that he did, because it enabled him to see that the centre of the Christian life is a living relationship with God himself through Christ Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit. The chapter is a reminder to all of us that we too are to be converted, that we too might have such a living relationship with this celestial King. It is this relationship that enables us to have a missional vision of the kingdom. This conversion led Kuyper from a liberal view of Scripture to a hermeneutic of trust in God's written Word, putting emphasis on personal rebirth in relation to the experience of the kingdom of God, and he longed for a lively orthodox Christianity and a church that embraced contextualization without undermining the gospel of Christ.

Chapter 2: Creation and Redemption

The blazing centre of 'the Kuyperian tradition is the sovereign God, who has come to us in Christ' (Bartholomew 2017:35).

Kuyper advocates a *particular grace* for the salvation of the elect, which in turn presupposes *common grace*, that is, God's preserving of his creation after the fall.

His view of the work of Christ, therefore, extends beyond the saving of individuals, to include the renewal of all of creation. The implications of this are that Christianity is not only relevant to church and mission, as important as they are, but to all areas of life, avoiding sacred/secular dualism. The chapter highlights Kuyper's affirmation of re-creation, yet Bartholomew suggests, and I think correctly so, that Bavinck's theology of a *renewed* creation, that is, the restoration of creation,³ is considerably more helpful than Kuyper's view. Bavinck, who wrote more theology than Kuyper, offered a more helpful view on common grace and had a stronger emphasis on eschatology. I find myself appreciative of Bavinck's eschatology. I was glad to see Bartholomew pick up on the distinction and Bavinck's eschatological development.

3 cf. Bavinck 2008:715-730.

A helpful overview of Bavinck's theology of nature and grace is offered in the chapter, which then explores the major views in some detail, namely: (1) grace against nature (Anabaptism), (2) grace over nature (Roman Catholicism), (3) grace alongside nature (Lutheranism), (4) grace within nature (Calvinism), and (5) grace equals nature (liberalism). The Kuyperian tradition, of course, takes the view of grace working within nature, healing it of sin and evil. Kuyperians take the gospel to be the healing power that renews creation, bringing it in line with God's original design and future consummation— grace restores nature.

Chapter 3: Scripture

Bartholomew, unapologetically, makes it clear that at the very heart of the Kuyperian tradition is also the conviction that 'God has spoken authoritatively and finally in Jesus and that we find his fully trustworthy Word in the Bible, which is normative for all of life.' (2017:78). Both Kuyper and Bavinck were exposed to critical biblical scholarship, and yet while they were not biblical scholars themselves, they had a firm understanding of modernist theology and biblical criticism and responded to it accordingly with vigour. Kuyper developed three primary critiques of biblical criticism (2017:83): (1) it tears apart theology and substitutes it for something that is not theology, (2) it robs Christians of their Scriptures, and (3) it leads to unhelpful clericalism in the church.

While Kuyper affirms the inspiration of the original Biblical monographs, he rightly rejects the ‘magical dictation’ view, but does allow for some incoherence in one’s understanding of inspiration, so long as it maintains the orthodox view of inspiration, and yet, despite his criticism, he recognises the value of affirming critical biblical scholarship insofar as it explores the history of the Bible’s production.

Bavinck, on the other hand, stresses that word and fact go together in the revelation of Scripture, Scripture being the servant form of revelation. Bartholomew explains how Bavinck finds himself at home in Kuyper’s view, but he expands upon it, arguing for a more organic view of inspiration, enabling an understanding of Scripture coming more fully into its own. Both Kuyper and Bavinck saw with absolute clarity, the importance of holding fast to Scripture as God’s infallible word. The chapter ends on a disappointing note, that mainstream biblical criticism has, for the most part, triumphed in the Netherlands. In contrast, Bartholomew urges that Biblical studies in the Kuyperian tradition update and reform, and proclaims that ‘Kuyper calls us back to Scripture and then out into the world, to being thoroughly biblical and thoroughly culturally engaged.’ (2017:99).

Chapter 4: Worldview

Bartholomew offers an anecdote of how he experienced worldview and the illumination and excitement of being able to name his Christian faith as a worldview which extended beyond the ‘church view’ and included the whole of creation becoming the theatre of God’s glory. Yet, it never occurred to him that the Kuyperian tradition and the Christian worldview could be used in support of Apartheid. Nevertheless, it helped him to see how the gospel bears critically on all spheres of life, including the racism of South Africa.

Kuyper’s Stone lectures, or *Lecture’s on Calvinism*, presented at Princeton in 1898 gave expression to his passion that Calvinism relates to all of life, and that it ought to work tirelessly to relate God’s sovereign law to all of life. Unfortunately though, as Bartholomew relates, Kuyper never really developed a logically tight theory of the Christian worldview. Nonetheless, he saw Calvinism as a worldview because it has a distinct theology and church order, along with a political and social life, through which one might interpret the order of the world. One ought to keep in mind, according to Bartholomew, that while Kuyper saw Calvinism as the only adequate worldview in which to view the world, he used the term in a broader sense.

Worldview according to the Kuyperian tradition, is that which springs from our lives and our hearts and is then reflected and informed by what is termed antithesis, that is the gap between humanity's finitude and God's infinity. For Kuyper, Calvinism has restructured previous models whereby the church was against the world, setting the church over the world, and withdrawing control from the church in order for all of life under God to emerge.

The cultural mandate of Genesis 1 was therefore rediscovered along with the vocation, so that God is to be served in all areas in life. Despite frequent use of 'worldview', there have been some criticisms, namely (2017:118–124), (1) it intellectualizes the gospel, (2) it universalizes the gospel, (3) it relativizes the gospel, (4) it becomes disconnected from Scripture and thus becomes vulnerable to the spirits of the age, and (5) rather than leading to the transformation of society, a worldview entrenches middle-class Christianity and leads to unhealthy messianic activism. Notwithstanding, Bartholomew defines worldview as, 'articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story which are rooted in a faith commitment and which give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives.' (2017:124). Worldview is then an analysis of our beliefs and their interrelatedness. Bartholomew argues that if being human means that we all have worldviews, then surely as Christians we should have a Christian worldview.

Chapter 5: Sphere Sovereignty: Kuyper's Philosophy of Society

In this chapter, it is argued from a Kuyperian perspective, that 'Cultural engagement requires a philosophy of society' (Bartholomew 2017:131). Yet, as Bartholomew bemoans, Christians often fail to influence their contexts because of a lack of understanding of their own context; they are unable to develop a nuanced approach with respect to how the gospel might impact their culture. This chapter on Sphere Sovereignty demonstrates how Abraham Kuyper was remarkably engaged with his society and culture. His 'sphere sovereignty' really becomes the framework for his philosophy of society. One ought to keep in mind, however, that his 'sphere sovereignty' was built upon the work of John Calvin and his mentor and friend, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer. According to the framework of sphere sovereignty,⁴ God provides temporal and spiritual authorities as part of his plan for this world. The original and absolute authority resides in the majesty of the triune God who is the only sovereign.

⁴ 'In his *Our Program* Kuyper fleshes out the implications of sphere sovereignty for government and other areas of life'.

The notion finds expression in Kuyper's most famous quotation, '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!"' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:147). While this sovereignty does not lead to determinism, it offers the basis for authentic human freedom. Therefore, God delegates his authority to humans, which allows us to witness God's authority exercised in human office. At the very core of sphere sovereignty is that creation is never self-sufficient, but is contingent on its creator for existence, meaning, and flourishing. Sphere sovereignty helps us to differentiate between the various areas of culture and public life.

Bartholomew, however, does point out that sphere sovereignty is not as 'clear cut' as Kuyper has made it out to be and that 'the boundaries between spheres are far from absolute' (2017:143). As helpful as sphere sovereignty is, it seems to me that one ought not be too emphatic. The Kuyperian tradition encourages Christians to 'engage in the spheres in such a way that they become healthier and directed rightly so that they flourish' (2017:144). The chapter then offers further reflection on issues like (2017:147–157), (1) politics: the state between absolutization and libertarianism, (2) the church, (3) activity, that is, Christian involvement in the spheres, (4) the economics of globalization, (5) the challenge of Islam, and (6) the controversies of sphere sovereignty and apartheid. In light of Kuyper's racist views, Bartholomew unapologetically states that although his views reflect the times, they are the lowest point in Kuyper's thought. His racial comments were wrong and profoundly unhelpful with respect to the future of South Africa. Nevertheless, Bartholomew considers sphere sovereignty a helpful heuristic in discovering the shape of society, yet he believes, and I think rightly so, that it is in need of further thought and development.

Chapter 6: The Church

Bartholomew begins his chapter on the church by proclaiming, 'In our Western world the church is too often like a slumbering giant, fast asleep while its energy and life are sorely needed' (2017:161). Yet, Kuyper sounds the call to awake this slumbering giant, as he wrestled with what it means to be the church in such a way that it is contemporary and relevant.

Abraham Kuyper and the Kuyperian tradition lay emphasis on the church as our mother, reminiscent of Cyprian's words, 'You cannot have God for your father if you have not the church as your mother' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:163).

Bartholomew explains how one begins with the church and concludes with culture, with Calvinism as the glue that joins the two, at least this is according to Kuyper. Kuyper articulated a view of the church as follows: (1) the church is a free community of faithful believers, (2) voluntarily gathered through loyalty to Christ (Bartholomew 2017:167), (3) made alive by the work of the Spirit in the heart, (4) performs works of righteousness in the world, and (5) thus sows the seeds of the kingdom of God, (6) which is the distinctive teaching of Jesus. Among other discussions, Bartholomew explores issues of the church as organism and institute, liturgy, mission and the spirituality of the church, which are no doubt helpful in understanding the church from the Kuyperian perspective. Of interest, though, is the author's review of Bavinck's theology of the church.

Bavinck has a clearer articulation of the relationship between the church as an organism and institution, which for him are both parts of the visible church. The invisible church, on the other hand, reminds one that there is also a spiritual dimension to the church. Not dissimilar to Kuyper, Bavinck also views the church as our mother, but assigns the attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity to the church. He believes that the church 'distributes its spiritual goods for the benefit of the whole of humanity and for every aspect of human life' (cited in Bartholomew 2017:185; cf. Bavinck 2008:390). As Bartholomew points out, 'The gospel is good news not only for the individual but for humanity as a whole: for the family, for society, for the state, for art and academia, for the cosmos, for the entire groaning creation.' (2017:185; cf. Bavinck 2008:437).

Chapter 7: Politics, the Poor, and Pluralism

The introduction of Chapter 7 reminds us that Protestantism has generally viewed government as a post-fall institution and as an aspect of God's common grace to restrain evil and uphold social justice. Bartholomew is persuaded, however, that government is given with creation, having a far more positive role even after the fall. Nevertheless, politics is a significant part of contemporary society and thus ought not to be neglected. It is not surprising that Abraham Kuyper then gave much focus to Christian political action, in a pluralist milieu, a space in which alternative visions competed in the public arena. Kuyper was not a political theorist, and yet he was an 'organic intellectual' when it came to politics.⁵

At the very centre of Kuyper's political agenda was his theology of sphere sovereignty, arguing that the right to execute authority is delegated by God alone.

⁵ Some of his Christian political energies were in co-founding the Free University, establishing a political party, the Anti Revolutionary Party (ARP), and facilitating the development of a nationwide network of Christian schools.

6 cf. Kuyper 2015.

Kuyper argued that Scripture, as well as the study of creation and history, ought to be that by which the government is to determine its laws. Yet, when it comes to justice, God alone has the right to determine what is just and unjust. Nevertheless, as Bartholomew points out, Kuyper was careful to avoid biblicism, being mindful that the Bible is not a catalogue of legal requirements ready at hand, but is the inspired record of God's revelation about life. Kuyper emphasised that the state is a dynamic moral organism which arises in response to God's laws for creation. In this way it is a part of a living whole, that is one sphere among many spheres. One needs to keep in mind that Kuyper's agenda here in *Our Program* is not a vision for a Calvinistic utopia but is rather intended for the flourishing of the whole country.⁶ While being a realist and being acutely aware that inequality will always be with us, he pursued a certain degree of equality whereby basic needs would be met, namely, shelter, food, and clothing. Bartholomew ends off the chapter with the following exhortation,

When it comes to Kuyper's thought on the issues of his day, one cannot help but feel that Kuyperians have failed to hear this call. Prophetically, Kuyper saw consumerism emerging in the wake of industrialization, and in this respect, Kuyper must be reckoned alongside Karl Marx. We live now amid the tsunami of global consumerism, with an apartheid-like economic divide between North and South. And most Western Christians seem quite content with this situation (2017:212).

Chapter 8: Mission

The heartbeat of God's people is mission, to be sent. Abraham Kuyper and the Kuyperian tradition offer us a wonderful and comprehensive vision of mission. Bartholomew points out in the chapter how 'all of Christian life has a missional *dimension*, not all of it is characterised by a missional *intention*' (2017:214). While Kuyper addressed the topic of mission, as primarily evangelism, particularly to the Jews, Muslims, and pagans, his theology and worldview were thoroughly missional. He argued that Scripture ought not to be used to criticise the methodologies of missions, but rather to construct an architectonic theory of mission from Scripture, together with ethnological, historical, and psychological studies, in addition to knowledge of other religions and the skill of persuasion and the conviction of sin. Evidently, Kuyper recognised the need for contextualisation.

However, it was Herman Bavinck's nephew, Johan H Bavinck who pioneered missiology in the Kuyperian tradition, arguing that missiology is an integral part of theology.

He initially placed the focus on mission in preaching the gospel and on pastoral concern, but later integrated mission into the Kuyperian concept of mission in all areas of life. In turn, this anticipated the work of the Kuyperian scholar and philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff. For Bavinck, the doctrine of creation is foundational for mission, because creation means that no one nation is higher or better than another before God, for God is sovereign over all of creation, all of it is his. Biblically then, the motivation for mission is God's glory. Salvation is inclusive of both personal and cosmic dimensions and encroaches on every aspect of human life, according to Bavinck. For him, mission finds its place in the context of biblical eschatology and God's kingdom, 'missionary activity is oriented toward God's purpose for the world, his eternal kingdom' (Bartholomew 2017:229–230).

Chapter 9: Philosophy

In this chapter, Bartholomew tells us that while Abraham Kuyper himself did not give much attention to developing a philosophy, today the philosophy of such luminaries such as Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and C Stephen Evens have been deeply shaped by the Kuyperian tradition. Although Kuyper never says that he is doing philosophy, he does so, at least implicitly when he discussed science,⁷ and he does it well, according to Bartholomew. So, while Kuyper practised Christian Philosophy implicitly, Herman Bavinck explicitly recognised the need for a philosophy of revelation. Both Kuyper and Bavinck gave the Stone Lectures at Princeton, although Bavinck's lectures were devoted to the theme of the philosophy of revelation, arguing that 'Christianity does not conflict with reason but has a content that transcends reason. Revelation disclosed the mystery of God, providing us with insight that is available in no other way' (Bartholomew 2017:525). He believed that revelation has implications for all of life, including philosophy. Nevertheless, Bartholomew states that Bavinck's philosophy was actually more in line with studies in worldview than a Christian philosophy and that it was up to the Kuyperians, Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven to develop the contours of Christian philosophy. Today, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff have developed a Kuyperian philosophy along analytic lines, called Reformed epistemology. And the philosophy developed from Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven is known as Reformational philosophy.

The chapter offers discussions on both philosophies within the Kuyperian tradition. Firstly, in the Reformational philosophy, Bartholomew acknowledges how Dooyeweerd's philosophical work is heavily reliant on Kuyper's work.

⁷ Today when we talk of science we think of natural science, but for Kuyper it is all of the academic disciplines (Bartholomew 2017:243).

Drawing deeply from the Kuyperian understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, Dooyeweerd identified four ground motives in which he outlined much of his philosophy (2017:255–256), (1) the form-matter ground motive, (2) the mature-grave ground motif, (3) the nature-freedom ground motive, and (4) Creation-fall-redemption. Kuyper's sphere sovereignty in creation was also foundational to Dooyeweerd's philosophical output. Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven constructed their Christian philosophy from a Continental approach, having been influenced by neo-Kantianism, Martin Heidegger, and Edmund Husserl. Secondly, Bartholomew discusses Reformed epistemology. It was in 1980 that *Time* magazine identified Alvin Plantinga as the 'world's leading Protestant philosopher of God' (Bartholomew 2017:260).

A result of Reformed epistemology is the theory of Classical foundationalism, which is 'a picture or total way of looking at faith, knowledge, justified belief, rationality, and allied topics' (2017:260), which has been hugely popular in Western thought. Plantinga and Wolterstorff have developed philosophy in many areas, such as science and evolution, education, liturgy, justice, biblical interpretation, and so on.

Although Bartholomew has a preference for Continental Reformational philosophy and views all of Christian philosophy as inherently missional, he believes that Reformed epistemology has been the more perceptive of the two, grappling with the epistemological foundations of philosophy in a major dialogue with mainstream philosophy. He implies that if one wishes to do Christian scholarship, one ought to be grounded in Christian philosophy.

Chapter 10: Theology

Although Abraham's public work received most of the attention, he was first and foremost a theologian. Yet, little theology has been developed from the Kuyperian tradition in recent years, with most of the focus being placed on politics and philosophy. Bartholomew sees this as a serious mistake, and argues that the rich theology of the three great theologians of the Kuyperian tradition, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and GC Berkouwer needs to be retrieved and updated for our day.

For Kuyper, the knowledge of God is the object of theology, and thus natural theology has little consequence.⁸

⁸ Similarly, Bavinck writes, 'Dogmatics is, and can only exist as, the scientific system of the knowledge of God. More precisely and from a Christian viewpoint, dogmatics is the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to the church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him' (2003:38).

He distinguishes two types of knowledge of God, (1) *archetypal knowledge*, which is God's knowledge of himself, that which is unknown to us, and (2) *ectypal knowledge*, that is, a knowledge of God that he has revealed to us. Theology finds its object in this *ectypal knowledge* of God which has been revealed to us. Kuyper was aware of creation's context and that special revelation presupposed creation and that the *imago Dei* provides the vessel for God's revelation of himself. His major insight, according to Bartholomew was that God reveals himself for his own sake and not first for the sake of humankind; this is evident in creation.

In addition, special revelation takes sin into account, and in this regard, he offers an anti-individualist view of revelation, stating that revelation is not just for the individual, but is for all of humanity and the entire creation. Kuyper taught that Scripture is God's revelation to the communion of saints. This means that theology ought not to be simply the pursuit of an individual, but that Scripture requires the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in order for us to hear God's Word through it. The Holy Spirit then interprets revelation to the church, explains Bartholomew.

As is evident in his four-volume, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck was more systematic than Kuyper, yet there is considerable agreement between the two. The next major theologian after Kuyper and Bavinck was Berkouwer, who himself engaged with Kuyper and Bavinck continuously in his *Studies in Dogmatics*, but also engaged seriously with Karl Barth as a major dialogue partner.

Both Kuyper and Bavinck constructed their theologies on the certainty that God has spoken and has done so principally in Christ as well as in Scripture, and thus is utterly foundational to theology. Lastly, they did theology that kept the whole of creation in view, making their theology public theology. Here Bartholomew exhorts the church to develop a contemporary theology of the world.

Chapter 11: Education

Early in the chapter, Bartholomew states that today a crisis in education is acknowledged widely, and that it needs some kind of grand narrative in which it can find its purpose. He advises that the old consumer, mechanical, or technological approach for getting educated to get a job will no longer do.

The chapter highlights education as one of the spheres in sphere sovereignty,⁹ and that the family, school, and government all connect in this educational sphere.

⁹ cf. Kuyper's recently translated and published work, *On Education* (2019).

Kuyper disregards a neutral public education as ‘moral suicide’, and states that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children, and that inappropriate interference from the state is dangerous. Bartholomew explains how for Kuyper, while parents ought to decide on the way in which their children are to be educated, the church, on the other hand, decides how such principles would be preserved in the school, the government decides on the educational level, and lastly, the teachers decide how children will be taught.

He describes a sevenfold view of Christian education as follows: (1) parents hold primary responsibility for the education of their children, (2) the church has a right and the responsibility to see performed what has been promised at the time of a child’s baptism, (3) teachers must be able to make their own decisions about matters of pedagogy, (4) nurture and education are inseparable, (5) voluntary donations to support schools are better than compulsory taxation, (6) free initiatives by citizens ennoble a nation, whereas state meddling debases it, (7) a school that makes it difficult for the intellect to submit to God’s ordinances and so sets itself against the Christian religion must be deemed a curse and not a blessing for the nation (Bartholomew 2017:297).

Kuyper had a concern for the poor and the education of their children, and as Bartholomew notes, in South Africa, it is the poor who are likely to receive an inferior education, locking them into poverty. Christian education, he argues, ought not to remain a middle-class privilege, but ought to have a preferential option for the poor, especially when many poor people are Christian. This Bartholomew believes, ‘would be an extraordinary gift and witness if first-rate Christian schools were to emerge in South Africa specifically for the poorest of the poor’ (2017:305).

This chapter ends off by highlighting what Kuyper’s envisions for education: (1) *the need for intellectual coherence*. Students are to acquire a more connected view of the academic intellectual universe, in order for them to recognise and engage with the conversations that make the universe cohere (2017:309–313). (2) *the need for plausibility*. One might refer to a plausibility structure as a network of practices, habits and social interactions that support and make credible a certain set of beliefs, and the way in which one views the world. (3) *the need to be for the world*. The Christian worldview needs to be rooted in and to be embodied in a plausibility structure in order for it to be effective in being a credible witness to the world. Bartholomew argues that the Christian university as a Christian institution must not exist for itself, but for Christ and thus for his world.

It is to be a sign of the victorious ‘reign of Christ in a consumer culture gone mad’ (2017:313).

Chapter 12: The Need for Spiritual Formation

Bartholomew offers a warning to those who are as enamoured with Abraham Kuyper and his theological tradition as he is, imploring his readers not to absolutize him, reminding us of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:12 (ESV), ‘each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos”, or “I follow Cephas”, or “I follow Christ.”’ ... I follow Abraham Kuyper. The Kuyperian tradition is indeed very valuable, as long as it is biblical and offers an ‘authentic expression of Christian faith’ (Bartholomew 2017:315), and one needs to remember that the tradition is not the infallible Word of God. Thus, we ought to test all that we learn from the tradition against Scripture, says Bartholomew. Kuyper himself was very much aware of the dangers of intellectualism. Bartholomew shares such a concern, that the Kuyperian tradition may become unhelpfully cerebral, manifesting sometimes in some sort of messianic activism and triumphalism that would usher in God’s kingdom. In light of this, he sees that there is a great need for Christian spirituality in the Kuyperian tradition if we are to retrieve it, and bring it to its full potential. Prayer and the reading of Scripture, he argues are inseparable, and these practices are to be developed in the devotional life of the Kuyperian.

Herman Bavinck, himself, has argued that the imitation of Christ is the heart of spiritual life. He holds together a deep, Christocentric spirituality with cultural engagement, and suggests that true imitation of Christ is being conformed to the image of Christ. Much harm is done, Bartholomew argues, when Kuyperians make much noise about God’s sovereignty and grace but fail to demonstrate the grace and humility of Christ in their lives.

Bartholomew explains that spirituality is all about daily hidden practices that are ongoing which create space for the Holy Spirit to transform us in order that we might become more like Christ, and shine in our needy and dark world. It is therefore critical, Bartholomew argues, that Kuyperians need to learn even from those outside the tradition. But he continues to assure us that ‘the Kuyperian tradition has the resources to produce culturally savvy Christians today’¹⁰ (2017:323) Nevertheless, we are to continue to be deeply involved in our local churches, and make spirituality an integral part of our lives in every sphere, living ever more deeply in Christ the King.

¹⁰ cf. Staub (2008).

4. Evaluation of the book

Bartholomew's book, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Theology*, offers his readers a challenging, yet rich overview of a vast amount of theological output from Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Calvinism. Twelve well-chosen themes from the Kuyperian tradition were highlighted as chapters. As helpful as this is, though, one ought to keep in mind that the tradition consists of much more than these themes, and no doubt some readers would be surprised or even disappointed that other themes and issues of concern were not included in the book.¹¹ Be that as it may, the book was well ordered and skilfully written. Bartholomew's evaluations at the end of most chapters were very applicable for our own time and context, especially those instances when he related the tradition to South African history and the current situation of the beloved country. For those wanting a big picture, a bird's-eye view by way of a working summary of Abraham Kuyper's thought, and the contributions from other Kuyperians, this is an invaluable resource.

11 cf. De Jong (2018).

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