



A HISTORY OF THE REFORMATIONAL MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN: THE PRE-WORLD WAR II YEARS

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This paper looks at the development of neo-Calvinism in Britain during the period up to World War II (WWII). Though the term neo-Calvinism is broad, the focus here will be on the Reformational strand associated with the approach of Kuyper, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

Keywords: neo-Calvinism, Reformational philosophy, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Sovereign Grace Union, Henry Atherton, Britain

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Hierdie vraestel kyk na die ontwikkeling van neo-Calvinisme in Brittanje gedurende die tydperk tot die Tweede Wêreldoorlog (Tweede Wêreldoorlog). Alhoewel die term neo-Calvinisme is breë , sal die fokus hier op die Reformatoriese strand wat verband hou met die benadering van die Kuyper , Dooyeweerd en Vollenhoven.

Sleutelwoorde: neo-Calvinisme, Reformatoriese filosofie, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Soewereine genade-unie, Henry Atherton, Brittanje

1 INTRODUCTION

Neo-Calvinism is often used as a synonym of Kuyperian. It would include Vantillians, i.e. followers of Van Til's presuppositionalism, Reconstructionists, such as R.J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen and Gary North and those in Reformational circles who associate themselves with the approach of Dutch philosophers Herman Dooyeweerd and D.H.Th Vollenhoven.

Some of the distinctive characteristics of the Kuyperian neo-Calvinist standpoint would include the following (Bishop 2012):

1. The emphasis that Jesus is lord over all of creation hence the idea that all of life is to be redeemed
2. The importance of the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26ff)
3. The biblical framework of Creation, fall and redemption
4. Sphere sovereignty
5. A rejection of dualism
6. Common grace
7. The antithesis
8. The role and influence of worldviews
9. The role of God's laws or creational ordinances
10. The rejection of the concept of religious neutrality

To the list of distinctives that make up neo-Calvinism for those Reformational circles we could add:

11. The distinction between structure and direction
12. The rejection of the autonomy of theoretical thought
13. The idea that reality has different modal aspects





The focus here will be primarily on those in Reformational circles. At present in the UK there have been three *main* centres of Reformational thought and action: Bath, Cambridge and Leeds associated with Richard Russell (Christian Studies Unit), John Peck (College House) and David Hanson (International Association for Reformed Faith and Action (IARFA) and West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies (WYSOCS)), representing slightly different forms of Reformational thought. Other key players have included Stacey Hebden Taylor, Alan and Elaine Storkey, Irving Hexham, Rex Ambler, Jonathan and Adrienne Chaplin, Andrew Basden and Jeremy Ive. These will be the subject of a second paper dealing with the post-World War II era. This first part begins the story a little earlier. Coletto (2010) provides a fascinating look at neo-Calvinism in France and Italy, and this paper attempts to do the same by looking at the scene in pre-WWII Britain.

2 ENGLISH-DUTCH CONNECTIONS

There are a number of small but subtle influences between the British and the Dutch neo-Calvinists. The influence of Britain on Kuyper was initially significant.

The Dutch Réveil movement, which influenced Kuyper's mentor Groen Van Prinsterer, can be traced back to the work of Robert Haldane (1764-1842) in Geneva c.1819 and the *Réveil générois*. It was Kuyper's reading of *The Heir of Redclyffe* by the British author Charlotte M. Yonge (1853) at his then fiancé's suggestion that was responsible for a major shift in thinking if not conversion in Kuyper. The novel, a tract for the Oxford Movement, helped shape some of Kuyper's views on the church.

Kuyper first visited the UK in 1866 to do some research at the Dutch stranger church in London. John à Lasco, the subject of his research, had been the pastor there. Kuyper later wrote about the Dutch church in London.

Another visit to London followed his wife's miscarriage in 1872. A third visit, this time to Brighton, had a great effect on Kuyper. In the summer of 1875 he came to hear the holiness teaching of Robert Pearsall Smith (1827-1898). The conference was entitled the 'Convention for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness.' P.J.E. van Soeterwoude, founder of the Dutch Evangelical Alliance (Nederlandsche Evangelische Protestantsche Vereeniging) in 1853 and had been active in the Reveil (Bundy 1993), invited several Dutch pastors to attend the Brighton meeting. Along with Kuyper came Frans Lion Cachet, Gerth van Wijk, Adama van Scheltema and Baron von Boetzelaar (Bundy 1993, 130).

The Brighton visit had a major effect both on Kuyper and on Pearsall Smith. Pearsall Smith had been counselling a young female in his hotel room and allegedly 'put his arm around her'. This was misunderstood and Pearsall Smith was sent home under a cloud (Bebbington 2000, 76-77). Consequently, Pearsall Smith withdrew from his holiness 'ministry'. Pearsall Smith spent the last ten years of his life living in England; his daughter married the philosopher Bertrand Russell. Involved with the Brighton meeting were E.H. Hopkins and H.W. Webb-Peploe and it proved to be a stepping stone for the Keswick conventions. Over 8,000 attended the Brighton conference.

The Dutch group were later hosted by Kuyper in August 1875 in his home (Bundy 1993:130). They started a magazine *De Weg ter Godzaligheid* [The Road to Godliness] with the aim of spreading the holiness idea of 'sanctification by faith'. It ran for twelve issues from October 1875 until 1877. Kuyper contributed only one piece to this magazine (Kuyper 1875.09). In it he takes to task Gunning's view of a second conversion which neglected baptism.

Kuyper also presented a paper to the third Southern Missionary Festival at 's Heer-Arendskerke on 23 June of the holiness movement in Britain. This was reported in *Het derde Zuider Zendingstest* (Kuyper 1875.07).¹

De Bruijn (2014:103) notes that Kuyper was impressed by these meetings. He compiled a report in the 6 and 7 June 1875 issues of *De Standaard*. He described it as a 'Bethel experience'. However, Kuyper soon after the visit had a breakdown. This was attributed to overwork. At the time, he suffered from insomnia and was taking the sedative chloral hydrate, which was popular at the time.

It is not clear why Kuyper found the Brighton meetings so enthralling. The holiness approach was theologically far from his Reformed theology. It may be the discrepancy between holiness teaching and Kuyper's experience and theology that contributed to his breakdown. His flirtation with the holiness movement seemed to dissipate after his breakdown. The Keswick teaching with its emphasis on personal holiness led to a private/ public dualism something that was at odds with Kuyper's approach.

Kuyper changed from being an Anglophile to an Anglophobe largely due to the British approach in South Africa. The South African issue marked a sea change in Kuyper's view of the British. Kuyper produced a paper on the *South African Crisis* for a French journal *Revue des Deux Mondes* at the request of its editor Charles Benot. The paper was subsequently translated into Dutch, German, Swedish and English. The English translator was A. E. Fletcher, it was published in England by The Stop the War Committee (Kuyper 1900.12).

Kuyper came on a diplomatic mission to London in November 1883 and then again in 1901 as prime minister he came to London on a state visit to offer himself as an intermediary between the British and the Boers. Unfortunately, the offer was rejected.

Kuyper also visited England *en route* from his way back to the Netherlands from the States when he delivered his Stone lectures in 1889.

The other major figure associated with neo-Calvinism at the time was Herman Bavinck. The only time he visited Britain was for the 400th Calvin Centenary held in 1909 at Marylebone Presbyterian Church, London. Bavinck delivered a paper on 'The leading ideas of Calvin's "Institutes"' (Bavinck 1909).

¹ The references to Abraham Kuyper's work use the format utilized in Kuipers (2011).



He concludes with our debt to Calvin':

We are indebted to him for the independence of the Church and the free exercise of its discipline; the emancipation of the congregation and its presbyterial government; the limitation of the power of the State and the people's consciousness of liberty; the budding of home virtues and faithfulness in an earthly calling; the restoration to honour of the natural life and the increase of care for the common welfare the close connection between the earthly and the heavenly callings, and the opening of the eyes to the divine glory, which is spread forth over the whole creation.

3 THE INTER-WAR YEARS

3.1 The Role of the Sovereign Grace Union

In May 1932, an important conference took place in London with the title: 'The Reformed Faith: commonly called Calvinism'. This international conference was the eighteenth conference organised by the Sovereign Grace Union (SGU). It was held at Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London and at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London (SGU 1932).

The secretary of the SGU and pastor of Grove Chapel was Henry Atherton (1875-1933). Unfortunately, Atherton was unable to attend because of illness. The conference was the result of the desire to form an international connection between Calvinists. It was the forerunner of what was to become IARFA (International Association for Reformed Faith and Action).

The Sovereign Grace Union's origins go back to May 1875 in Brighton. Several meetings saw the start of the 'Bible Women's Mission' (Tait 1985). The aim was the 'dissemination of the principles of Sovereign grace in Brighton'. This led to the Sovereign Grace Mission (SGM). The president was Revd Thomas Lawson (1828-1904) (Hyde 2014:2).

By 1902, there were three key people involved: Thomas Lawson (Brighton), Andrew Joseph Baxter (of Cavendish Chapel, Eastbourne (1832-1908)) and Thomas Bradbury (Grove Chapel, Camberwell). Lawson died in 1904 and the SGM ceased functioning.

In 1904, one of Thomas Bradbury's friends, William Sykes, started what he called Sovereign Grace Union meetings in Sheffield. There is an early report of these in the *English Churchman*.

SOVEREIGN GRACE UNION

Sir, - Will you kindly allow me once more to express my gratitude to the readers of your valuable paper for sending me their copies, and also for the parcels of literature, during the last twelve months? The time is fast approaching when we recommence our open-air campaign. Last year, from May to September, we held 150 meetings, gave 333 addresses, distributed 20,000 tracts, &c., and 15,000 people were reached. We shall be very thankful for any literature of a distinctively

Protestant, Free Grace nature for circulation. We purpose exposing the awful heresies of Romanism, Ritualism, Mormonism, spiritualism, and the recent American importations. We shall specially deal with the Higher Criticism and the New Theology. The remedy -- the Gospel of the Grace of God -- will of course be put in the forefront.

WILLIAM SYKES, Hillsborough Vicarage, Sheffield, May 9th

Sykes (1861-1930) was a headmaster at Bewcastle, Cumberland, before becoming ordained in 1889. He trained for ordination at St Aidan's Theological College, Birkenhead. He married Anne Jane Dodgson in 1885. His first curacy was in Manchester, he then moved to Tunbridge Wells and then to St Bartholomew's, Carbrook, Sheffield. He then moved to the parish of Hillsborough and Wadsley Bridge - where he remained for fourteen years (Anonymous, 1930). There he became police chaplain and was on the Sheffield Board of Education. He became the first president of the Sovereign Grace Union.

Sykes moved to Audley, Staffordshire in 1919 until ill health resulted in his retirement in 1927. He joined the 'Motherland' Lodge of Freemason in London, he was a prominent Orangeman and was senior deputy grand chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England.

Thomas Bradbury's successor at Grove Chapel, after being without a pastor for seven years (Lock 1919), was Henry Atherton (1875-1933). Atherton was born 'of pious parents' in Wigan where Bradley's father had been a doctor.

Atherton came 'under conviction of sin' after a chain of events triggered by discovering a tract on the mantelpiece at home which had read 'Where will you spend eternity?'. Atherton threw it in the fire, but the next day a man fainted and died at Atherton's feet and Atherton heard a voice: 'If that had been you where would you spend eternity?' Atherton thinking it was someone speaking behind him responded 'In hell', but he was alone. For months Atherton struggled with the conviction of sin, he read the Bible and realised he needed Jesus as his saviour.

He began to tell his collier friends of his faith and became a Sunday School teacher in St George's, Bolton. With the support of the Evangelical bishops in the Church of England Atherton undertook mission work in Durham and then Carlisle (Charmley 2014:11). Atherton had an intense dislike of the Romanising influences in the Church of England. Atherton resigned his role as church missionary and returned to Wigan and became secretary of the Wigan branch of the National Protestant League.

In 1897, he married Ellen Hilton and then in 1899 he became a travelling evangelist for the Church Association (Charmley 2014:14). This led to his becoming the Pastor of the Church of England Protestant Mission in Halifax, Yorkshire, and then from 1908-1910 the Pastor of the Church of England Evangelical and Protestant Mission, Oxford, which he left





to take up the post of evangelist for St. Paul's, Halliwell, Bolton in the north-west of England.

He was involved for fourteen years with the Church Association. The Church Association was later to be amalgamated with a number of organisations to form the Church Society. Atherton eventually accepted the call to be the pastor of Grove Chapel in 1913 after preaching there as a supply. He remained there until his death in 1933.

Sykes's example had prompted Atherton to form the Sovereign Grace Union out of the Brighton Mission. William Sykes became the president - he remained so until his death in 1930 - Atherton became its secretary. The newly revived SGU under Sykes and Atherton started to publish literature in association with C.J. Francombe & Sons of Ludgate Circus, London. They also held regular conferences. The publication of literature and the organisation of conferences were two key aims of the SGU.

The SGU was a pan-denominational Calvinist organisation based on free grace doctrines. In each of their publications this 'vision statement' was printed:

THE
Sovereign Grace Union is
ONLY
Interdenominational Society standing or a
PROTESTANTISM
Which the Martyrs considered
WORTH
Dying for. It is by
MAINTAINING
Truth Reformation. Principles that alone
IS BUILT UP
An effective opposition to Rome, based
ON SOUND
Foundations which magnify the
FREE GRACE
Of the Triune Jehovah, and
DOCTRINES
Of the Everlasting Gospel.

The basis of faith was:

1. The Absolute Sufficiency of Holy Scriptures for all matters of Faith and Practice
2. The Triune Jehovah
 - a. The Sovereignty of God
 - b. The Deity and perfect Harmony of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - c. The Personality of the Holy Spirit.
3. The Fall of Man.
4. Unconditional Election.
5. Particular Redemption.
6. Effectual Calling.
7. Justification by imputing the Obedience and Satisfaction of Christ.
8. Final Preservation.

The first SGU conference was held in 1915 in Grove Chapel,

Camberwell with the topic. Our benefits in Christ. The speakers included Atherton, Thomas Houghton (1859-1951) and William Sykes (1861-1930). Subsequent held included topics on Grace (1916), Covenant (1917), Redemption (1918), Some foundational truths (1919), The Lord Jesus Christ (1922), The atonement (1923), The Holy Ghost (1924), The church and Calvinism (1926), Doctrinal principles (1927). All were typical traditional Calvinistic concerns. A brief change came in 1928.

In 1928 Revd Dr Jan van Lonkhuyzen (1873-1942) addressed the 15th Annual SGU Conference expressing a desire for international cooperation between Calvinists. Van Lonkhuyzen was born in the Netherlands and had pastored churches in Grand Rapids (1918-1928) and the First Christian Reformed Church of Chicago (1918-1928). In 1928, he took up a call to Zierikzee, the Netherlands. It seems that he came from the Netherlands to deliver his address. The only details given in the published proceeding were 'Representative from Holland'.

His address started by stressing the need for unity: 'the more unity there is the more cordial and the more complete the cooperation can be'. Unity is found 'in God who elected us' and 'there is unity in the Holy Spirit'. This is the same for all Christians, but Calvinists 'are also united in one Confession of Faith'. He quotes B.B. Warfield's definition of Calvinism with approval: Calvinism is 'the purest form of Christianity'. He then reminds his hearers that Calvin was an 'emblem of International Christianity'. Christians from all over Europe flocked to his theological school in Geneva. He goes on to stress the great need for a united effort among Calvinists:

First, there is the task for the Calvinists of each country to perform for and in their own country. They should band together and form one national Calvinistic league, in order that it may be seen that God has still in that country His people who stand for the old truth. This is indeed giving honour and glory to God for His faithfulness.

He mentions the need to hold to all the five points of Calvinism: 'as you do here'. To leave one of them is to embark on the slow slide downwards into Arminianism. He goes on to emphasise the need to be involved in education: '... Christian instruction not only in the home and in the Sunday School, but also in the Weekday School, in the Grammar School.' Then:

'Christian parents should not rest before they have Christian schools for their children! You can never make up for or counteract in one or two hours what is not taught, or wrongly taught on five days of the week.'

In good Kuyperian style, he goes on to stress the sovereignty of God over all:

'God is the sovereign, the King of our children. We may not do with them what we like to do; we must acknowledge His sovereignty over them also.'

Then we, as Calvinists, have a task to apply these principles to politics, to science, etc.; in a word, to every



sphere of life. God is sovereign not only in religion, but in every domain, and this must be acknowledged. That is what Calvinism is for, and for which we have to work together. A mighty task! "Crown Him Lord of all!"

He concludes with a rallying call:

For that purpose it will be advisable for Calvinists of all nations to band together, and to show to the whole world that there is still, through the Lord's grace, a people left that has not bowed the knee before the Baals of our times! Indeed, such an international league of Calvinists of all countries will give honour to God and His truth over the whole world. And these national leagues of Calvinists, united in one international league, can greatly help, guide, teach and support one another. We have many enemies over against us - Rationalism, indifference, superstition, etc. We have a tremendous struggle.

It's not clear what the SGU made of his Kuyperian call. One thing is certain and that is that it was a stepping-stone towards an exploratory visit by the SGU to the Netherlands and to the 1932 International Conference in London.

In the 1928 proceedings van Lonkhuyzen's paper is followed by 'An appeal' by Revd E.C. Unmack. He responded with: 'I believe his meeting to be of God. Our brother has struck a note identical with my own soul.' His appeal is:

Are there fifty people who will write to the secretary [Atherton] and say, "Realising that we are face to face with a critically urgent situation, and in imitation of the faithful men at the Diet of Spires, who were faced with ruin but were true to God, we are prepared to go where you send us, to preach, or do anything on behalf of the cause of sovereign grace in all its glory and beauty?" I ask, Are there fifty men that will give themselves to that holy purpose?

Atherton, in his General Secretary Address, sends greetings to 'our brethren scattered abroad in various parts of the world'. There is an increasing widening of the scope of the SGU. Greetings are sent to those in the British Empire:

... that Empire was built upon Calvinistic principles by Calvinists, who gave us Calvinistic laws and a Calvinistic throne.

He does lament the fact that no one from Scotland had come and been able to 'witness' at the conferences. That would change with the involvement of Maclean and Macleod in subsequent years. He also sends greeting to Holland. Noting that:

Since the revival of the doctrines of grace, and the noble work of Dr A. Kuyper, things have been looking brighter.

He is obviously aware of Calvinists abroad. [Auguste] Lecerf and [Emile] Doumerge from France, Dr Eugen Sebestyen and

Professor Kovats from Hungary, Mr Eerdmans, the publisher, are all mentioned by name. There is thus an increasing international focus/ awareness for the SGU. Lecerf certainly had Dooyeweerdian sympathies (he was born in London).

One year after van Lonkhuyzen's rallying call a number of SGU delegates visited the Netherlands. The 1929 October issue *Peace and Truth* contained a report, newspaper articles and photographs of the delegation.

Cole, H. B. 1929. 'The S.G.U. tour in Holland' 73-75
Unattributed - these were taken from reports in the newspapers
'English Calvinists in Holland' 75-78
'Delft- Rotterdam-Dordrecht' 79-81
'A trip to Utrecht and its surroundings' 81-82
'An impression of Holland' 83-85

The SGU delegation visited included The Hague, Delft, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Leiden, Amsterdam, Volendam, Merken and Utrecht. The sixteen SGU delegates included: Henry Atherton and his wife, Revd C. D. Pool, Revd Charles Breed, Mr R Hanson (the father of Dr David Hanson).

They were impressed by the 'vigorous life of the Calvinistic faith'. They attended a Sunday morning service at The Hague, where Revd Barkey Wolf preached from Isa 67:15 Cole notes 'Of course we were unable to follow his discourse, but our ignorance of the Dutch language did not prevent us from recognising upon the preacher's lips ... this one brief and typical sentence 'God is Sovereign,' and we felt at home.

After the service, they were addressed by Wolf in English. Atherton responded to Wolf by saying that he was sorry he could not speak Dutch as he would like 'to read the works of Kuyper in their original language'.

That evening at the Wolfs' home they were introduced to the 'Misses Kuyper'. Kuyper's daughters both read papers to them one [F. H.] on 'some important charitable institutions in connection with the Free Reformed Church, and the other [H.S.S.] on the work of the Calvinistic Girls' Union.'

They met with Kuyper's successor H. Colijn at Kuyper's House in The Hague on 15 August. The meeting was facilitated by van Lonkhuyzen. The SGU members were keen for international collaboration or federation. Their aims were:

1. To bring Calvinists of all countries into closer contact with each other.
2. The propagation of these basic principles by publishing Calvinist materials.
3. The organization of national and international conferences.
4. Its own publications.

The following were suggested could be involved:

Netherlands: Prof Hepp...; Scotland: Prof Maclean;
American J. van Lonkhuyzen, Prof Kuizenga,
M. Broekstra, Prof L. Berkhof, H. Beets, Prof S. Volbeda,





Prof Fox, Prof Mackenzie, Prof Wilson; France: Prof Lecerf and his circle; South Africa: Prof Du Toit; Hungary: Prof J. Sebestyen; Germany: W. Kolffhaus.

It was hoped to organise a conference in London in mid-September. But this was considered too far too soon. Colijn was keen to broaden the scope of the aims. He suggested:

1. The acceptance of the obviousness of the dangers of Christian faith and practice arising from the growing denial of God's sovereignty;
2. The confession of the full sovereignty of God in every sphere of life and of his Word as a rule of faith and practice;
3. Propaganda principles mentioned in point 2 to combat the dangers mentioned under 1.

The outcome of the meeting was that:

1. one should begin with the formation of national committees;
2. which would be available on the common principles and more clarity be sought by private correspondence;
3. the work of the national committees would be different in different countries;
4. in connection with the still weak expressions of Calvinism in countries like Germany, France, Switzerland, Hungary it should be possible have contact between Britain, the United States and the Netherlands and others for the time being;
5. international cooperation would initially mainly consist in exchanging speakers and holding conferences.

In a letter dated 21 August 1928 Colijn writes of the meeting:²

The Hague,
21st August 1928

Gentlemen,

I met with Messrs Atherton, Talbot, Wakeley, and Falkner on 15th August.

The result of this discussion will be evident from the minutes presented herewith. The Sovereign Grace Union is an organization comprised of members from different denominations in England whose aim it is to strengthen and disseminate the Reformed doctrines within their own congregations, especially the doctrine of election.

In addition to this, an awareness has arisen within this circle that the Calvinistic world and life view has a wider application than has hitherto been part of their activities. It has especially been the latter that has motivated them to seek to make contact with Calvinistic believers in other countries.

As far as the people are concerned, it seems to me that Rev. Atherton is the most positive. He was familiar with some of Kuyper's writings and has an open mind for the broader significance of Calvinism. Rev. Atherton used to belong to the

² I am grateful to Dr Alida Sewell for this translation.

Anglican Church but after his conversion no longer felt at home there and went to a Congregational church. His opinions are occasionally capable of surprising the Dutch Reformed people, especially when he starts to talk about the Battle of the Boyne and the Loyal Orange Institution, where it would seem that he has aligned those with the Reformed doctrines.

And yet, he is an attractive personality with extensive knowledge, a warm faith, and a good Calvinistic foundation.

Rev. Talbot is a much calmer personality. He discerns the limitations of what is possible more accurately, but he does not have the driving force of Rev. Atherton. Mr Talbot is still a preacher in the Anglican Church in Portsmouth.

Neither of the other two gentlemen contributed much to the discussion. Nevertheless, they gave the impression of being calm people with well-considered opinions.

My final impression of the discussion is that we can continue in our country to try to form a national committee of those who are prepared to envisage the possibility of international co-operation of Calvinists, and that we shall then have to see what these gentlemen, or their organization, can establish towards this purpose.

Respectfully,

H. Colijn

In the report in *Peace and Truth* 'An impression of Holland', presumably by Atherton, the emphasis is on the historic roots of Calvinism in the Netherlands:

But of greatest interest to us - as members of the Sovereign Grace Union - were the places where the great Free Grace Dutch fathers carried on their noble work, and where Calvinistic battles were fought and won.

He acknowledges the instrumental role of Kuyper in the revival of Calvinism there and notes that one-eighth of the population hold to the Reformed faith, with 'an aggressive religion that enters into their every-day lives'. But despite 'such a wonderful revival, religion itself finds itself attacked by an irreligious foe.' The foe it seems is lawlessness and Bolshevism. He concludes by stating that "Even at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" and we rejoice that our brothers and sisters in Holland are praying for us.'

3.2 The First International Conference of Calvinism (1932), London

Despite Atherton's pessimistic conclusion to his report of a persecuted remnant, the visit did help pave the way for the May 1932 International Conference: 'The Reformed Faith: commonly called Calvinism'. This international conference was the eighteenth conference organised by the Sovereign Grace Union. It was held at Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London and at



the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London.

In the Preface to the Conference Proceedings the author(s) write:

For some years past there has been a growing desire on the part of many brethren for some form of *international* connection for mutual benefit between Calvinists throughout the world. Since 1928, when the Rev. Dr J. van Lonkhuyzen first addressed a meeting on the subject in London, an extensive correspondence has been conducted by the Sovereign Grace Union with Calvinists in other countries, and thus was prepared the way for the First International Conference of Calvinists, when representatives from eight different countries met and exchanged views.

Delegates from different countries met to consider the possibility of 'formulating a scheme for the ultimate formation of an International Federation of Calvinists'. Those that attended included:

Prof G. Besselaar, Ph.D., representing the Calvinistic Bond of South Africa;

Dr C. Beekenkamp, representing His Excellency, Dr J. Colijn, of the Kuyper School, The Hague, Holland;

Prof Dr F. W. Grosheide and Prof Dr V. Hepp. of the Free University, Amsterdam;

Pastor W. A. Langenohl, of Dusseldorf, representing the 'Jung-Reformierte' in Germany;

Prof A. Lecerf, B.D., President of the Société Calviniste de France;

M. le Pasteur H. Migot, of the French Reformed Church, Brighton;

Rev. J. Tolland, of the Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church, Belfast, N. Ireland; and the Rev. W. Davey, Secretary, Trinitarian Bible Society, London.'

The Sovereign Grace Union was represented by:

Rev. E. C. Unmack, B.D. (Lond.), D.D. (Oxon.) who chaired the meeting in the stead of Prof Donald Maclean, and Pastor S. W. White, Vice-Presidents; Mr P. Wakeley, Chairman; Mr. E. J. Peacock, Treasurer, and Mr W. B. Burbridge, Secretary.

Numerous others couldn't attend and several sent messages, these included Henry Atherton, Donald Maclean (Scotland), van Lonkhuyzen, (Holland), J. Sebestyen (Budapest), and J. Warren (S. Ireland).

The following resolution was submitted by the SGU:

The Committee of the Sovereign Grace Union, whilst

emphasising its insistence upon a sound doctrinal basis as fundamental to any truly Calvinistic Federation, is of opinion that practical co-operation is immediately possible, and ultimate Federation may be eventually achieved by (i.) Official correspondence between Societies of each country; (ii.) Interchange of Society publications; (iii.) The publication annually, by each Society in its own magazine, of a "letter" (or report) from each of the other Societies co-operating; (iv.) Possible arrangement of further International Conferences in other centres.

The Committee further maintains that each Society shall retain its own individuality and jurisdiction in its own affairs, and shall not be bound by any acts on the part of any other Society.

It was thought that 'a more definite statement as to the Doctrinal Basis was desirable'. It was agreed unanimously that only those Calvinistic bodies that adhered to the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the 39 Articles of the Church of England, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Confession of La Rochelle, or 'any other recognised National Confession of the Protestant Reformed faith' could be invited 'to federate'.

It was also suggested that the newly-formed (1929) *Evangelical Quarterly* could serve the interest of Calvinists throughout the world. Maclean - who was unable to attend as his wife was suddenly taken ill was to chair the meeting - was one of the editors of the *Evangelical Quarterly*.

The *Evangelical Quarterly* did in part fulfil the interest of Calvinists. It was the first UK journal to publish a paper on Abraham Kuyper and it published articles by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. Articles with a broadly neo-Calvinist approach published before WWII include (these include Waterink 1929; Kolffhaus 1930; Kuyper 1931; Vollenhoven 1931, 1932a,b; Stoker 1932a,b, 1933a,b; 1935; Lecerf 1932, 1933, 1935; Anema 1935).

The South African Reformational philosopher H.G. Stoker (born Johannesburg)³ contributed three papers to the *Evangelical*

³ In 1925 he received his doctorate from the University of Cologne, Max Scheler and Arthur Schneider supervised his dissertation on conscience. In 1925 he returned to South Africa and began to teach at the PU for CHE, then known as the University College of Potchefstroom.

Stoker's work has been undervalued and largely ignored in the northern hemisphere. Van der Walt (2014) - drawing on the work of Tinus van der Walt (2013) - gives a number of reasons. Stoker did most of his main work in Afrikaans and little has been translated. His style was often long-winded. His approach was often more theological than Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven and this may have proved unpalatable for most philosophers. But perhaps the main reason is his condoning of apartheid, which occurred during the main development period of Reformational philosophy. The relationship between the VU - the main nexus of philosophy at the time - and universities in South Africa was not the best during this time. South Africa suffered political isolation.





Quarterly (EQ) (Stoker, 1932, 1933, 1935). He taught at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education from 1925 to 1970 and served on the board of the journal *Philosophia Reformata* from its inception in 1935. Stoker described his brand of Reformational philosophy as the 'Philosophy of the Creation Idea' as well as drawing on Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven he was also influenced by Herman Bavinck and V. Hepp. As N.T. Van der Merwe (1993) notes, Stoker's contribution in South Africa was highly regarded: he was awarded two honorary doctorates, had a full membership of the South African Academy of Science and art and bestowed the Stals Prize for philosophy. He visited the States in 1946 and Canada in 1973.

In 'The possibility of a Calvinistic philosophy' (Stoker, 1935) he starts by bemoaning that the 'philosophical contributions of Calvinists betray that they often — too often — confuse theology and philosophy' (Stoker 1935:17). He is clear philosophy is not theology and theology is not philosophy: a Christian philosophy 'must be definitely distinguishable from a Calvinistic theology' it should have a 'domain and task of its own' (Stoker 1935:17). That domain according to Stoker is 'the cosmos as a unique whole and the relation of any particular being to the whole' (Stoker 1935:19). He identifies questions such as 'What is the cosmos, what is the stays of man or life or of matter in this universe?' as belonging to philosophy, and questions such as 'What is the nature of God, what are his attributes? belong to theology (Stoker 1935:19). Though theology and philosophy are distinct they are related. Both 'accept nature (as far revealed to us in our consciousness) and the Scriptures (as the divine revelation of God) as sources of knowledge' (Stoker 1935:19-20). For philosophy to grasp the cosmos as a whole it must do so transcendentally (from the outside):

As a member of a mob you cannot command a view of it, but the outsider, the bystander, can; human personality is unintelligible from the "view-point" of a blood corpuscle, however much this corpuscle may have travelled through all parts of the human body; the beauty of a painting can never be "enjoyed" by one of its paint-patches. Likewise the ultimate meaning, significance and unity of cosmic reality can never be understood from a mere human viewpoint, i.e. as long as man (as a part of it) views it "from the inside", from a cosmically immanent standpoint.' (Stoker, 1935: 20).

This rejection of a transcendent revelation means that an immanent position must be found from within the cosmos. This would then result in an *-ism*. Something which a Calvinistic philosophy would steer clear of if it wishes to remain

Stoker was a commandant in the Ossewabrandwag, an anti-British and pro-German organisation - this would not have endeared him to most Europeans. He was interned in 1942 for his pro-German sympathies.

Consequently, numerous doctoral projects have been published on both Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd's work, but only one, a critical one, by Malan (1968 in Afrikaans) on Stoker. It is for the above reasons that Stoker's contribution had little impact in the UK despite the EQ papers.

Calvinistic.

The '-isms' of all immanent philosophies promote some particular principle of reality to the status of a unifying universal principle with the result that the meaning and import of such a principle is unlimitedly exaggerated and even "divinely" idolized, and with a further result that the other and essentially different principles of immanent reality are seen in the light of this universalized or idolized principle, thus giving a forced and an artificial view of these other principles. This means that all immanent philosophy is in one way or other guilty of subjectifying and falsifying reality (Stoker, 1935:21).

A Calvinistic philosophy is thus possible, Stoker concludes. But not only that it can be genuinely objective in a way in which immanent philology can never be. A Calvinistic philosophy will be a transcendent philosophy, and only a transcendent philosophy is able to see the whole of cosmic reality. Sadly, it seems this pre-World War II plea for a Calvinistic philosophy went largely unheeded in the UK.

The EQ editor, Maclean had a number of Dutch connections. His opening address at the Free Church College, Edinburgh was on 'The Influence of Calvin on Scottish Politics' was translated into Dutch and published in *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde*. Rgan van de Dr Abraham Kuyerstiching. He also lectured at the VU University in March 1927 his lectures were later published as *Aspects of Scottish Church History*.

Prior to the First International Conference the SGU had been involved with the publication of Kuyper's *Stone Lectures on Calvinism* with an introduction by Henry Beets - it was co-published with Eerdmans in April 1932. F.W. Grosheide makes mention of it in his presentation at the First Conference. Following on from the impetus of the First Calvinistic Conference several other International conferences followed. The Second International Conference of Calvinists took place in Amsterdam 23-26 October 1935. The third took place in Geneva (1936) and the fourth in Edinburgh (1938) another in 1948 in Amsterdam and in 1953 at Montpelier that marked the beginning of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action (IARFA). IARFA was the precursor to WYSOCS (West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies).

Van Lonkhuyzen's call at the 1928 SGU conference provided the catalyst for the SGU to be involved in pursuing international connections. As we have seen Atherton and others from the SGU visited the Netherlands and the SGU hosted and organised the First International Conference. However, there were other individuals and organisations that were involved in forming international Calvinist connections. One of the key individuals was Valentijn Hepp. Key organisations were the French La Société Calviniste de France (founded 1926), the South African Kristelik-Nasionale Bond van Kalviniste in Suid-Afrika (National Christian Society of Calvinists) (founded in 1929) and the Dutch De Bond van Gereformeerden (Calvinisten) in Nederland (founded in 1929).



countries on the present situation of Calvinism.

THURSDAY OCT. 25TH

10.00 Fourth Session. 'The Sovereignty of God and political life'.

Speakers: Prof Dr A. Anema, Amsterdam, and Prof Dr I. Bohatec Vienna.

20.00 Fifth Session. 'The Sovereignty of God and Oecumenical life'.

Speakers: Prof Dr Th. L. Haitjema, Groningen, and Prof D. Maclean, D.D., Edinburgh.

FRIDAY OCT. 26TH

10.00 Sixth Session. 1. 'The Sovereignty of God and religious life'.

Speakers: Rev. C. Breed, Ilford, Essex, and Dr E.C. Unmack, St. Albans.

14.00 Closure of the Conference.

By this time the British contingent was reduced, although Maclean was still very much involved. British interest waned until the fourth conference, where the Sots predominated.

3.4 The Third International Conference of Calvinists (1936) Geneva

The Third International Calvinistic Conference (1936) was held in Geneva 15-18 June. Schilders' fears of an increased Barthian influence in these conferences were confirmed at Geneva.

3.5 The Fourth International Conference of Calvinists (1938) Edinburgh

The fourth International Conference returned to Britain in 1938.

This conference was held in Edinburgh (6-11 July). The proceedings were published by the Congress Executive in 1938. The editorial committee comprised: J. H. S. Burleigh (Edinburgh), W. H. Hamilton (Edinburgh), S. Leigh Hunt (London) and W. Roundsell (Edinburgh).

The conference was organised by Revd Professor Donald MacLean DD, of the Free Church College, Edinburgh. The Honorary President of the Conference was Revd Daniel Lamont (1869-1950), a professor at New College, Edinburgh from 1927 to 1945 and a Moderator of the Church of Scotland (1936-1937). He was the author of *Christ and the World of Thought* (Lamont, 1935). (Oliver Barclay - a major protagonist of the Dooyeweerdian perspective in Britain - cites this book as having an initial influence on him (Barclay, 1997:29). Thomas Torrance was likewise influenced by Lamont.)

In 1923, Hepp wrote a number of series of articles 'Cooperation of all Calvinists' and then in 1925 he proposed an international collaboration of all Calvinistic churches. He suggested that the basis of this cooperation should be Kuyper's Calvinistic philosophy (de Vries 1974, 407) Unfortunately, because of ecclesiastical problems in the Gereformeerde Kerken Hepp has to delay his proposals and plans. In the meantime van Lonkuyzen in Chicago was also desiring international cooperation. As we have seen it was his visit to the SGU conference that precipitated the First International Conference in London.

3.3 The Second International Conference of Calvinism (1934), Amsterdam

Tweede Internationale Congres van Gereformeerden (Calvinisten) was held in Amsterdam 23-26 October 1934. Before the conference took place there was controversy. One influential Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder (1890-1952) took exception to the inclusion of Theo Haitjema (1888-1972) as a speaker, Schilder considered him not to be a Calvinist but, by his own admission a sympathiser of Barth (de Vries 1974:413). Schilder wrote to Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, they had been involved in the initial discussions regarding the conference, as a result they both withdrew from involvement, partly because Reformational philosophy would have no place at the conference and partly in solidarity with Schilder over Haitjema's inclusion (Verburg 2015:179-182).

The subsequent proceedings were published in 1935 by Marthinus Nijhoff. The conference was international and made use of four languages. The papers were published with abstracts in English, Dutch, French and German.

The conference opened in a prayer meeting on the evening of Tuesday 23rd October and closed the following Friday. The key theme was the sovereignty of God. Six sessions took this as their title:

PROGRAMME.

TUESDAY OCT. 23RD 1934.

19.30 Prayer Meeting.

21.30 Reception by the Dutch Organisation Committee.

WEDNESDAY OCT. 24TH

10.00 First Session. 1. President's Address. 2. 'The Sovereignty of God'.

Speakers: Prof Dr V. Hepp, Amsterdam, and Prof A. Lecerf, Paris

14.00 Second Session. 'The Sovereignty of God and Civilization'.

Speakers: W.A. Langenohl, V.D.M., Rheydt, Rhineland, and Prof Dr J. Severijn, Utrecht.

20.00 Third Session. Communications from various





There were 156 members of the congress including Kuyper's daughter Catherine. Those from England attended included Douglas Johnson (the Inter-Varsity Fellowship secretary) and John Wenham (then a tutor at St John's College, Highbury).

The General topic of the conference was 'The Reformed faith and its ethical Consequences'. Papers were delivered on its consequences to:

To the individual (E. Sebestyen, Budapest; and W. Childs Robinson, USA)

In the family (John Macleod, Scotland)

In the church (G.T. Thompson, Scotland)

In society (R.J.G. M'Knight, USA)

In the state (V.H. Rutgers, Holland)

In economics (J.H.S. Burleigh, Scotland)

In art (Leon Wencelius, Strasbourg; P.R. Musculus, France)

The interrelation of theology and (secular) knowledge (J. de Saussure, Switzerland)

The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian life (W. Vischer, Basel)

The inclusion of economics and art at least suggests that a wider view than traditional, Old-School Calvinism. However, overall it is more Knox than Kuyper that is the prevalent approach. The majority perspective here is a far cry from the aim of Colijn. The movement away from a neo-Calvinist Reformational perspective is noticeable. The Barthian influence was less here than at Geneva, nevertheless, in his paper of 'The Reformed faith and the younger generation' the Revd David Read remarks:

(...) there has been the immense stimulus to our generation provided by the dynamic theology of the Word. I hope I may be allowed to mention the name of Karl Barth without being labelled Barthian. He, and, in this country perhaps to an even greater degree, Emil Brunner, has been a mighty formative - or rather - reformative - influence on the theology of the new age.

It is this continuing welcome of the influence of Barth and Brunner that in part scuppered the neo-Calvinist growth. Barth was antagonistic towards a distinctively Christian philosophy - this then undermined the Reformational approach. Christian philosophy tends, particularly by Barthians, to be seen as something of an oxymoron.

A fifth conference was planned to take place in 1940 at Embden, but the World War II prevented it happening. The Reformational perspective in the international conferences continued to be swamped by Barthian voices. This changed in 1951 at the conference with the formation of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action.

4 CONCLUSION

It is worth examining the aims outlined in the SGU trip to the Netherlands:

1. To bring Calvinists of all countries into closer contact with each other.
2. The propagation of these basic principles by publishing Calvinist materials.
3. The organization of national and international conferences.
4. Its own publications.

These were in part met: 1 and 4 through the international conferences; the *Evangelical Quarterly* at least, at first under, went some way to meet aims 2 and 3. However, with perhaps the exception of articles in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, the influence of neo-Calvinism was slowly waning. The onset of World War II put paid to any more international initiatives. The Barthian turn in some British Reformed circles also did much to taint the views of British Calvinists against neo-Calvinism. Barth had a strong antipathy to Christian scholarship.

It is the post-World War II and post-Barthian period I hope to look at in a subsequent paper.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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