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Kuyperania in 2018

ABSTRACT

This article looks at new works published in 2018 by or about the Dutch polymath Abraham Kuyper.

KEY CONCEPTS: *Abraham Kuyper, Discipleship, Immigration, Justification, Sanctification*

ABSTRAK

Hierdie artikel kyk na nuwe werk gepubliseer in 2018 deur of oor die Nederlandse polimaat Abraham Kuyper.

KERNBEGRIPE: *Abraham Kuyper, Dissipelskap, Immigrasie, Regverdiging, Heiligmaking*

1. INTRODUCTION

As ever, the publication of works in English on Abraham Kuyper has not abated. The graph below – with data taken from Google books – shows increasing interest in Kuyper.



FIGURE 1. Graph of the number of works published in English that mention Kuyper. The y-axis percentage shows the books as a percentage of all books published.

Source: *Google Books.*

Although the Lexham Press on behalf of the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society has not published any new material in 2018 we can look forward to the second volume of *Common Grace* and the third and final volume of *Pro Rege* being published April and July 2019, respectively. One publication by Lexham Press, for the Dutch Reformed Translation Project, is a one-volume edition of Kuyper's meditation entitled *Honey from the Rock*. It is this volume I shall examine first.

2. TRANSLATIONS OF KUYPER

The details in the style of Kuipers (2011) of the translation is as follows.

Translations

.01 *Honey From the Rock*

Daily Devotions From Young Kuyper

Bellingham, WA, Lexham Press 2018. 600 pp., 18.8 x 6.1 x 25.9 cm, - £31.65/ \$49.99
Translation of: *Honig uit den Rotssteen* 1880.12, 1883.08
Translator: James A. de Jong
Binding: Hardback
Published: December 2018
ISBN 978-1-683592341

In December 1877, Kuyper launched a religious weekly newspaper *De Heraut*. In it he wrote a column 'The Meditation'. The first meditation published was 'The weaned child' based on Psalm 132:2. This series continued until Kuyper's death. He produced over 2200 meditations. Many of these were subsequently published in book form. *To Be Near to God* is perhaps the best known of the reprints of his meditations and those reflect the mature Kuyper.

These meditations, on the other hand, are from early Kuyper. As such, there is little here on Calvinism as a worldview, sphere sovereignty, the antithesis or common grace (at least by name), or politics. The sparse reference to these topics include the term 'world and life view' mentioned in volume 2 meditation 37 and politics in volume 1 meditation 39. Though occasionally, we do have hints such as:

'The everlasting gospel, the evangelism *aeternum*, is and always remains a calling and requirement that demands public expression' (Loc. 2088).¹

'Don't make of what must be a world-embracing religion one that is concealed and withdrawn' (Loc. 2097).

This book is the first English translation of *Honing uit den rotssteen* which originally appeared as two volumes in 1880 and in 1883. *Honey from the Rock*, translated by James de Jong, contains 200 of the earlier meditations, those in volume 1 date from 1877–1880, while volume 2 covers the years 1879–1882. (The meditations were not published in the same order as they were published in the newspaper.)

Here we see Kuyper the pious. He wrote all the meditations on a Sunday and only missed writing four of them, and these when he was unwell. He continued to write them even during his premiership of the Netherlands.

Writing in his 2000th meditation Kuyper had this to say:

'Thus it may be said without exaggeration that these Two Thousand Meditations mirror a/an (important) part of my life. These Meditations constantly and naturally reflect whatever occupied, touched or moved me at the time of writing' (cited in Boer, 2015).

This underlies de Jong's comment in his Preface:

'One cannot understand Kuyper apart from his meditations. ... His meditations are the lens through which we are privileged to look into his soul' (Loc. 117).

The meditations were clearly aimed at Christians. Here we see Kuyper the pastor rather than Kuyper the political and social activist. Again, in his 2001st meditation, Kuyper reflected on his meditations.

'A Meditation is something completely different from an academic lecture or debate and varies greatly as well from a Bible exposition. When you intend to meditate,

1 The term Loc. identifies its position in the kindle electronic edition.

you retreat from your normal train of thought. You don't entirely withdraw from the world, but neither do you engage yourself mindlessly with the affairs that normally occupy you. You don't exactly extricate yourself from the world, but it becomes a secondary issue for you, while the crux for you is and remains concentrating on your experience of communion with God. While meditating, the soul is deaf to the world in order to exclusively listen to what God wants to say to your soul' (cited in Boer, 2015).

What we have here then is what God is saying to Kuyper's soul. The topics cover a wide range of subjects from 'Absolute authority' to 'Yeast'. The topics most discussed are as follows (the number indicates the number of time the topic is mentioned):

Christians and sin, 18	the church, 8
religious danger, 18	death, 8
the Holy Spirit, 16	fellowship, 8
grace, 14	love, 8
angels, 13	parenting, 8
spiritual victory and glory, 13	sin, 8
discipleship, 12	spiritual perseverance, 8
spiritual maturing, 12	believing, 7
communion with God, 11	assurance, 7
faith, 11	hypocrisy, 6
ministry to others, 11	rebirth, regeneration, 6
Christ's suffering, 10	worldliness, 6
election, 10	witness, 6
the Word of God, 10	conscience, 5
spiritual warfare, 10	sanctification, 5
the Devil and hell, 9	union with Christ, 4.
Christ's work in glory, 8	

Many foreshadow book-length topics such as grace, angels, and the Holy Spirit, which he dealt with later. In these meditations, Kuyper displays piety without resorting to pietism.

I now turn to new books that have either utilised Kuyper's insights (e.g. Kaemingk, 2018) or discuss Kuyper's approach (Himes, 2018; Park, 2018; and Brummel, 2018).

3. BOOKS ON KUYPER

3.1 *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*

What does Mecca have to do with Amsterdam? And what does Amsterdam have to do with Mecca? That, in essence, is what *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*, written by Matthew Kaemingk (2018) is about. What do Christians need to do to respond faithfully to the growing presence of Islam in the West? (23). Kaemingk, an assistant professor in Christian ethics and associate dean at Fuller Seminary, completed his PhD at Fuller and the Free University (VU) in Amsterdam looking at the issue of Muslim immigration and how the Dutch have adjusted to it. The fruits of his PhD are published in this book.

Not surprisingly, being associated with the VU and being based at Fuller, Kaemingk draws upon and develops the insights of Kuyper, not least Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and his advocacy of pluralism.

The key and crucial questions that the book seeks to address are:

'How should Western Christians respond to their new slim neighbours? Can

Islam and Christianity peacefully coexist? Are the limits to religious freedom and tolerance? How much religious diversity can a single nation withstand? (1).

Kaemingk writes for a dual audience, for Christians who want to understand and respond Christianly to Islam; and for non-Christians who are interested in seeing how Christians are attempting to coexist with other faiths.

He advocates a pluralist response that goes beyond the vociferous right wing ideology that has shaped so much of North American responses to immigration and also as an alternative to the left wing's romantic ideal of a multicultural society.

Following, the typology developed in Mouw and Griffioen's *Pluralism and Horizons* (1993) he identifies several forms of pluralism: cultural, structural and directional, and the three responses to these forms: descriptive, juridical and normative. A Christian pluralist, Kaemingk maintains, would fully embrace descriptive pluralism - taking seriously the differences within faith communities. As regards juridical pluralism the Christian pluralist would insist on the protection of the legal rights of different cultures and faiths. Cultural diversity is seen as a normative good, however, while defending the rights of other faiths, the Christian pluralist 'cannot ... take delight in the fact that they are directing their lives away from God' (19).

This book is a robust defence of pluralism. He shows that in order to be a good pluralist one does not have to be ambivalent towards one's own faith commitments. The defence of Muslim rights depends upon Christian convictions, not ambivalence.

To do this he draws extensively on Kuyper. In his introduction he conveniently lists the following:

1. Christians need to seriously wrestle with the problem.
2. Christians will need an alternative model to follow
3. Christians will need to develop robust and theological arguments against hegemony, uniformity and assimilation
4. Christians will need not only deconstructive arguments against uniformity but will need constructive arguments on behalf of pluralism
5. Christians cannot, however, simply look to the past; they must look forward
6. Christians need a complex understanding of the whole Christ to respond to a complex issue like Islam in the West
7. It is not enough for Christians to simply understand pluralistic ideas in their heads; they must desire pluralism in their hearts
8. Christians need real examples of what Christian action amidst this conflict looks like.

The book has four parts. The first looks at the way the Dutch have responded to Muslim immigration. The Dutch had three periods of political development: the Golden Age (1600s); the age of 'pillarisation' (1900–1960); and the progressive revolution (1960s). Kaemingk examines the responses in these three main periods. He notes that at the turn of the century an assimilation approach resulted in Islam became marginalised. Here he examines the different responses of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Theo van Gogh and Gert Wilders. One thing is clear that for the twentieth century Dutch the solution of liberalism wasn't working.

Part 2 then looks at a Christian alternative to liberalism: pluralism. Kuyper was the main architect of this pluralism. He was a dominant player in Dutch politics having given up the pastorate to become a politician and he even spent a brief period as the Dutch prime minister. Kuyper developed a theological basis for pluralism. As Kaemingk notes, Kuyper's 'Christian faith was not an impediment to his pluralism — it was his chief resource' (90). Kuyper developed a sturdy critique of liberalism - in essence liberalism failed to understand

religion and religious faith; they thought it could be kept private, education could unify different religions and that it was unique to religious people. They failed to see that liberalism as also a faith commitment. Kaemingk describes Kuyper's view of faith as being pervasive, pluriform and public.

In Chapter 5 Kuyper's construction of plurality is examined - this is one of the best descriptions and explanations of Kuyper's approach I've seen (see the mind map summary in Bishop, 2018). Kaemingk begins his exposition where Kuyper does with the sovereignty of God. Jesus alone is sovereign, therefore neither the state nor the pope are sovereign. In Kuyper's Christological sovereignty Kaemingk identifies two aspects: the temporal, Christ is lord of the past, present and the future; and the spatial, Christ is lord over every social space. He then looks at Kuyper's views on the pluralistic state, culture and church. Kuyper sees the role of the state as a crutch or a splint for a broken limb - it is lamentable but it is temporary. The state should defend the weak and powerless - the church should aid the pluralistic culture in being a production centre of virtues. The church's practices of diversity, toleration and forbearance should then spill out into a Reformed politics. The designation of the church as pluralistic, should, however, mean that it serves Jesus *exclusively* but serves culture pluralistically. Much of the misconceptions regarding the place of church in society have stemmed from a failure to recognise the distinction Kuyper made between the church as institute and the church as organism. The church is to be walls and windows; the institute as walls, a gathered community, separate from the world; but within the walls are to be windows, a scattered community, engaged with the world - organism and institute are distinct but not separate, they mutually support each other. He then explores three of Kuyper's resources for commonness: common grace, common humanity and common creation. These help avoid several mistaken tendencies: common grace avoids the extremes of liberal and sectarian approaches to pluralism; and a common creation avoids cultural relativism and cultural universalism/imperialism. These resources help provide a framework for pluralism. And yet Kuyper's approach is not without its weaknesses, Kaemingk goes on, in Chapter 6, to identify three deficiencies in Kuyper's approach: his narrow Christology, the need for worship to develop character formation, and a blind spot for action. These are then examined and addressed in the subsequent chapters.

Why is Kuyper's approach so relevant to today? It is rooted in scripture and in creation - both of which will always be relevant because the God who authored them is always relevant. Kaemingk has shown how it can be applied to immigration. Himes in *For a Better Worldliness* applies it to discipleship.

3.2 For a Better Worldliness

Brant Himes's (2018) book *For A Better Worldliness* examines the concept of discipleship for the common good. In doing so he draws upon not only Kuyper but also the Lutheran, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Himes eschews the traditional view of discipleship as merely focusing on the individual's inward journey. He sees discipleship as theology in action. He develops what Richard Mouw, in his foreword, obliquely refers to as cultural discipleship, discipleship for the common good. This is a much broader and more holistic vision of discipleship than is often seen.

Himes focuses on two key people Kuyper and Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer is the more obvious choice as he wrote a book entitled *Discipleship*, whereas Kuyper seldom mentions the term in his many writings. Yet for Kuyper discipleship 'was a way of life that encompassed all aspects of his life and thought' (Himes, 2018: 2). It is also notable 'for its world-directed trajectory' (3).

This project, then, seeks to offer a historically-based constructive theology of discipleship within Kuyper and Bonhoeffer. It is driven, principally and more specifically, by the following research question:

'how (if actually) does a historical and theological comparison of Abraham Kuyper, as a Dutch theologian and politician from 1894–1905, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as a German pastor then prisoner from 1935–1945, contribute to a concept of discipleship that is for the common good?' (11).

He focuses on two distinct periods in the life of Kuyper and Bonhoeffer, from 1894–1905 for Kuyper and 1935–1945 for Bonhoeffer. He begins with Kuyper in 1894 as this marks the start of his estranged relationship with Alexander de Savornin Lohman (1837–1924) and Himes uses this episode to explore the nature of forgiveness. Kuyper and Lohman had been collaborators over the formation of the VU and the *Doleantie*, yet it was the issue of voting franchise in 1894 that severed their relationship. Kuyper favoured opening up the voting rights, Lohman did not. This precipitated a split in the ARP and Lohman formed the more conservative Free Anti-Revolutionary Party. It also marked the end of their relationship - they didn't speak for the next twenty years. Kuyper, it seems offered an apology and forgiveness to Lohman and yet without reconciliation. Himes, then poses the question: does not reconciliation accompany forgiveness?

He then turns to Kuyper's *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology (EST)*. Here Himes seeks to explore Kuyper's understanding of discipleship using a four-part movement or interpretative framework:

The foundation of discipleship is the revelation of God.

The reality of discipleship is the sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

The action of discipleship is the necessity of belief-obedience.

The possibility of discipleship is participating in the ultimate promise of God's redemptive work for the common good of the world. (13)

Through these he helps to expound Kuyper's model of discipleship. The theological foundation of Kuyper's discipleship Himes detects in the *Encyclopedia*. For Himes *EST*:

'provides a certain level of comprehensiveness in introducing a holistic understanding of discipleship' (23).

He shows that for Kuyper discipleship, at least in the *EST*, was not limited to the 'soteriological impact on the individual' (29), it was reliant on the Holy Spirit, Christocentric, ecclesiocentric and was 'theology in action' (33). Himes identifies the close relationship for Kuyper between theology and the church. He also argues that for Kuyper his commitment to theological training shaped his commitment to discipleship (34).

Himes also examines Kuyper's 'Dienst des Woords' (Service of the Word) - a series of eighteen articles from *De Heraut*, dealing with themes important for pastors (#1895.04 and 1896.02 in Kuipers, 2011). Himes describes them as a 'training manual for pastors' (35). Unfortunately, these articles have not yet been translated into English. But here we have the next best thing Himes's summary of the key points. These I have summarised in Figure 2.

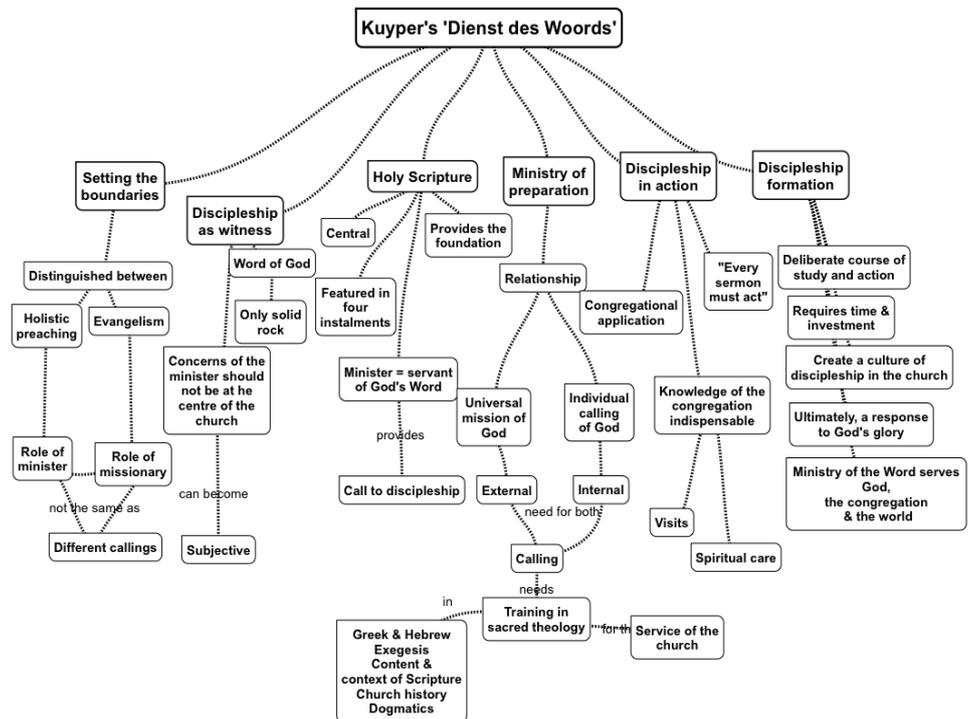


FIGURE 2. A concept map summary of Himes’s summary of Kuyper’s ‘Dienst des Woords’.

He notes that Kuyper’s common grace emerged out of his notion of sphere sovereignty and that it ‘enabled a very public theology, reaching out to the large society and culture’ (175).

In the preface he states:

‘For a better worldliness is not only a statement of Abraham Kuyper’s and Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theological concept and historical practice of discipleship, it is also -- and perhaps more importantly -- a call to engage in the fullness of the Christian life here and now’ (xiii).

The book does exactly that: it provides a call for a discipleship that engages with the world.

Another theologian who has examined Kuyper is Jae-Eun Park.

3.3 Driven by God

With the emergence of the recent Abraham Kuyper Translation volumes on Kuyper’s public theology, it is easy to overlook that Kuyper was a theologian. Park’s book, *Driven by God: Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification in the Soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper*, which began life as a PhD under John Bolt, serves well to remind us of that fact. It serves as a salutary reminder that Kuyper was not only a statesman, a politician, a journalist and educationalist but was also a theologian. He was the first theologian of the VU.

In *Driven by God*, Park examines and defends the notion of active justification and definitive sanctification. His starting point is John Murray (1898–1975) of Westminster Theological Seminary. Murray was one of the main advocates for definitive sanctification. To defend this view Park draws upon four Dutch theologians: Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), Alexander Comrie (1706–1774), Herman Witsius (1636–1708) and Kuyper. Bavinck supports the idea of the inseparability of the two concepts; Comrie is used to show the nature of objective and decisive salvation; Witsius, the Christ-centredness; and Kuyper the relationship with God’s sovereignty. Criticisms of active justification and definitive sanctification have been

made on the grounds that they lack biblical support, lead to theological confusion, and are of no practical benefit to believers. Park, utilising these Dutch theologians, faces these accusations face on and argues otherwise. He shows that salvation is God-driven and affirms human responsibility. Such an approach also avoids the pitfalls of both triumphalism and defeatism.

His discussion of Kuyper focuses on the issue of God's sovereignty in salvation. He begins by looking at some objections theologians have had to Kuyper's approach to modernism. Some, such as Pronk, Velema and Stellingwerf believe that Kuyper's approach was unsuccessful they feel it was, speculative and idealistic, and that Kuyper was too much influenced by modernism (Pronk) and romanticism (Velema and Stellingwerf). Conversely, Park cites Ambler, Rewerts and Ericson, who feel Kuyper's approach to modernism was successful.

Park goes on to show that for Kuyper God's sovereignty was fundamental; it is all-encompassing. This was a consequence of Kuyper's Calvinism, which begins with God and not humanity. Kuyper, thus rejects human-centred ideas or principles. This Kuyper sees in modernism. Modernism emphasises human subjectivity and thus places humanity over God – this was unacceptable to Kuyper.

Kuyper's sociological views are then examined. These embrace definitive sanctification and active justification. The former as it opposes Arminianism and synergism and because it provides a two-fold framework for holiness and sanctification. Kuyper uses the metaphor of a baby: perfect in parts, but imperfect in degrees. This illustrates definitive and progressive sanctification. For Kuyper sanctification is God's work and has an origin, a process and a completion. Humans are to cooperate with God, as God uses humans as instruments to fulfil sanctification. Regarding active justification and faith, Kuyper sees it embracing two contradictory views in scripture – justification is both from eternity and by faith alone.

Park has ably defended active justification and definitive sanctification. He has shown that it does have biblical support, is theologically coherent and has practical benefits – not least in providing a foundation for the assurance of perseverance.

Another author who has examined the deep theological resources of Dutch Reformed theologians is Nathan Brummel.

3.4 Dutch Reformed Theologians

Park looked at Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper; Brummel in his *Dutch Reformed Theologians* examines another set of theologians Gijsbert Voetius (1589–1676), William Ames (1576–1633), Herman Witsuis, Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), Foppe M. ten Hoor (1855–1934), Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965) and Kuyper.

In this book, there are short chapters on Voetius, Ames and Witsuis, but Kuyper takes the centre stage. Two chapters are devoted to Kuyper and three others deal with his view of common grace. The two concluding chapters look at the kingdom theology of Herman Hoeksema, Geerhardus J. Vos (1862–1949), Herman N. Ridderbos (1909–2007) and, surprisingly, Roger S. Greenway (1934–2016) and then a critical look the two kingdoms theology of Meredith Kline and Michael Horton.

Brummel sees Kuyper as a 'public mystic'. This Brummel sees as a positive attribute. He is less positive about Kuyper's views on common grace. His objection is primarily that common grace is unnecessary:

'What Kuyper explains in terms of common grace, I explain in terms of the providentially preserved creation structure' (187).

His thesis is that the continuing creation structure after the fall does not necessitate the

need for common grace. Humanity remained a cultural creature and thus continued to produce culture.

4. JOURNAL ARTICLES

Pahman (2018) notes that so far little attention has been paid to Kuyper's view of ethics. In this paper, Pahman attempts to remedy this. In the first part he advocates the view that Kuyper thought ethics was a sphere. In the second part, he examines Kuyper's relationship between ethics and the state. This he contends is for Kuyper, a reciprocal or mutually dependent one.

In his modified version of an address at the 2017 conference held at Princeton on 'Neo-Calvinism and the Church' J. Daryl Charles (2018) attempts to show that, although not part of Kuyper's vocabulary, he was 'at home in the natural law tradition!' Charles points out that the rescinding of the Kuyper prize to Tim Keller was un-Kuyperian in the extreme:

'Kuyper desired a lively and pluralistic public arena—an arena in which Christians were free to contend. Clearly, the seminary cannot tolerate such pluralism. And although it claims to tolerate—or even encourage—"diverse viewpoints" on the matter of sexual ethics, it clearly *cannot* tolerate divergence or disagreement of any kind. In truth, it is saying that disagreement on matters of gender and sexuality *dare not* be tolerated. And therewith it is declaring that historic Christian orthodoxy is unacceptable' (Charles, 2018:28).

Michael Bräutigam (2018) begins by noting the lamentable rise of right wing politics in Europe. By comparing three theologian/ politicians, Kuyper, Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) and, the Lutheran, Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909) he hopes to 'chisel out distinct theological elements of a public theology that bears significant potential to inspire an informed and effective Christian political involvement' (44): a public theology that will 'defend the rights of the socially disenfranchised' (53).

5. REVIEWS

Wagenman (2018), Ma (2018), Seerveld (2018) and Henderson (2018) have all favourably reviewed Bartholomew's *The Contours of a Kuyperian Tradition* (Bartholomew, 2017). Though Wagenman does note that:

'Bartholomew's treatment of Kuyper at times can tend toward over-simplification. This is understandable given that the project is an "introduction" and ideal for those new to Kuyper's thought. While Bartholomew highlights areas where Kuyper's thought has been distorted by his followers in destructive or unbiblical ways, he glosses over some of the evolution and contradictions within Kuyper's own life and thought that still challenge scholars' (Wagenman, 2018: 161).

There have been several reviews of volumes of the recent Kuyper translations.

Bruce Pass (2018) reviews *On the Church* (Kuyper, 2016). He concludes that 'It opens a hitherto closed window into the thought of one of the most colourful figures of Dutch ecclesial and political life.'

Five volumes of the Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology come under review in *Themelios* by Logan Dagley, Dennis Greeson, and Matthew Ng (2018). They conclude:

'No doubt readers will take issue with Kuyper at some points, for example his language regarding race and colonialism. Additionally, Kuyper's doctrine of sphere sovereignty, while a powerful conceptual tool, will need to be contextualized to concrete political situations. Nevertheless, these volumes not only provide helpful instruction on how to construct a theological lens through which to view all of life, but they also provide a much-needed example of innovative orthodoxy. Kuyper skillfully takes the rich resources of orthodox and historic Christianity, applying them with theological creativity to his unique cultural moment' (150).

Oliver O'Donovan (2018) takes a look at the first two volumes of *Pro Rege* – he is not too complimentary regarding Kuyper's style:

'Kuyper's manner is self-consciously didactic. He seems to speak from a pulpit with a Bible in hand and a congregation to wag a finger at.'

6. CONCLUSION

Although we have no publications of the Kuyper Translation Project we have seen that Kuyper is proving to be a useful conversation partner for contemporary ethical and theological issues in diverse topics such as justification, sanctification, discipleship and immigration. The resurgence of interest in Kuyper has also had a positive effect on research into other Dutch Reformed theologians as both Park and Brummel have shown.

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