

ABRAHAM KUYPER

A Centennial Reader

Edited by

James D. Bratt

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sheds light on great world problems. Even more, it does not place these two, the way of salvation and natural life, next to each other as in two ticket-lines but intertwines them and offers us a view of the world, its origin, its historical course, and its destiny in which the entire work of redemption fits as in an invisible matrix. With these fixed points in front of us, we are afforded the possibility of constructing an entire Christian science that frees us from idle speculation and gives us knowledge of the real condition of things, as it was, and is, and shall be.

Sphere Sovereignty

The Free University was at the heart of Kuyper's dreams. Here he could fulfill all his callings at once: scholar, institution-builder, leader, liberator, and guide of the common people. It is fitting, then, that the speech he gave to inaugurate the school captures so well the heart of his vision, from title to tone, in its substance and its unspoken assumptions.

The setting of the speech, that 20th day of October, 1880, was apt as well. Kuyper spoke in the New Church (in fact, centuries old) on Amsterdam's principal square, next to the royal palace — thus at the symbolic center of national life. The crowd of officials, dignitaries, academics, and common folk who gathered there witnessed "an impressive ceremony. The dim light of the somber autumn day fell through the high windows in the gothic arches of the ancient cathedral. The light accentuated the deep tone of the choir's oak walls within which the marble mausoleum of Michiel De Ruyter recalled [the] national struggle for liberty. With his back to the elegant copper screen Dr. Kuyper stood on a graceful podium, at the height of his powers."¹

The near-climax of Kuyper's speech comes at one of his most famous utterances: "... 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!'" The first half of that sentence sounds an equally vital conviction: "No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest..." In light of such holism, some dualities in the speech deserve special note. Kuyper's tone here is militant and combative, staking out turf for his own particular group. Yet throughout he invokes national icons and appeals to a shared "folk conscience" of biblical memory and republican virtue. The very title of the piece harbors another ambiguity. "*Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring*" can mean sovereignty in *its* circle, referring to the pluralistic ontology Kuyper unfolds in the text. But it can

1. J. C. Rullman, *Kuyper-Bibliografie*, vol. II (Kampen: Kok, 1929), p. 31.

mean just as well sovereignty in *our* circle, spelling out a pluralistic sociology and epistemology which Kuyper also argues for but which does not have ontological warrant. The tension can be resolved by assigning (à la Heidegger's title) the first term to being, the second to time. Or as Kuyper himself would explain later in *Common Grace*, the spheres of existence are given to all in creation under common grace; the divergence of worldviews, and so of human association, emerges under the operations of redemption or particular grace.

Finally, we should note that Kuyper here was founding a *university*. Higher education and advanced research had enormous importance for him: religiously, for exploring and enhancing God's creation; strategically, for (re)shaping society and culture; socially, for raising the self-respect and life-chances of common people. His too was a "culture of aspiration," but at once broader and deeper than the bourgeois sort which the educational revolution of his time aimed to serve.²

Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring might be the most difficult text in Kuyper's corpus; it is certainly the most challenging original for this anthology. I have followed a typescript translation by George Kamp available in the Calvin College and Seminary Archives. A more literal rendering, which differs substantively with the following at certain points, can be found in the appendices to Wayne A. Kobes, "Sphere Sovereignty and the university: Theological foundations of Abraham Kuyper's view of the university and its role in society" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1993). Greek terms and phrases have been translated by Kenneth Bratt.

Kuyper's speech was originally published (and ready by the day of its delivery!) as *Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring: Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten October 1880 gehouden, in het Koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kruyt, 1880). I have followed the definitive version of the text found in W. F. de Gaay Fortman, ed., *Architectonische critiek: Fragmenten uit de sociaal-politieke geschriften van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1956), pp. 40-73. The translation below does not include the lengthy (some 20 percent of the total) and ornate rhetoric by which Kuyper recognized the various agencies and dignitaries present on the occasion. (The Kobes translation does provide this.) It is otherwise complete except for two short paragraphs.

Throughout, I have translated *wetenschap* not only in its strict sense as "science" but also as "scholarship" and/or "learning," since these register the Anglo-American connotations that the Dutch original (like the German *Wissenschaft*) bears.

2. For the American context, see David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).



THE MEN WHO ARE IN CHARGE of this institution have assigned me the honor of inaugurating their school of higher education by introducing it to the authorities and to the public. For that task I ask your benevolent ear and generous judgment. You will recognize the earnestness of that request when you consider that I am not to deliver a professor's inaugural address nor that attending the transfer of a rectorship. No, the nature of my task bars me from the quiet retreat of scholarly research and drives me onto the treacherous terrain of public life where nettles and thorns wound at every step. We neither can nor would disguise it: we have not been driven to this work like Maecenas³ out of love for detached learning. Rather, the urge to this risky, not to say presumptuous, endeavor comes from the deep sense of duty that what we are doing *must* be done — for Christ's sake, for the name of the Lord, out of its high and holy importance for our people and country. Thus our action is not in the least ingenuous. We are deeply convinced that the interest that has anticipated this institution's founding through fair report and foul and that now attends its opening is not related in the least to our persons but has proceeded exclusively from the public's impression that the Netherlands is witnessing an event that might well leave its mark on the future of the nation.

Would we have undertaken this task if a higher standard could have induced us to acquiesce in the status quo? To put it mildly, our undertaking bears a protest against the present environment and suggests that something better is possible. Yet the appearance of presumption follows it like a shadow and causes some embarrassment, some diffidence. This might cause offense, this might hurt. Therefore I hasten to assure you that — given the scholarly power, the influence, and the money that oppose us — the assuredness of our words reflects no lofty imagination but a quiet humility. We would have preferred to stay in the rear; it would have been much more comfortable to see others take the lead. But since this was *not* to be, since we *had* to act, we came to the fore, hardly indifferent to human favor or aversion but drawing our *line of conduct* exclusively from what is demanded by the honor of our God.

3. Gaius Maecenas (d. 8 B.C.E.) was a prominent deputy of Caesar Augustus, patron of Virgil and Horace, and something of a minister of cultural affairs in the early Roman empire.

You expect me, then, to tell you how the school we are introducing fits into the Dutch garden, why it brandishes the liberty cap on the tip of its lance, and why it peers so intently into the book of Reformed religion. Let me link the answers to all three questions to the one concept of "sphere sovereignty," pointing to *sphere sovereignty* as the hallmark of our institution in its *national* significance, its *scholarly* purposes, and its *Reformed* character.

I. Its National Significance

Ladies and gentlemen, in this awesome century our nation too is struggling through a crisis, a crisis it shares with many other nations, a crisis that pervades the whole world of thoughtful humanity. Now every crisis concerns a threatened way of life whose course of illness augurs either a rejuvenation or a fatal degeneration. So what is the "threatened way of life" *here*? What is at stake for our nation? Would anyone repeat the old answers: that the contest is between progress and preservation, between one-sidedness and complexity, between the real and ideal, the rich and the poor? The inadequacy, the distortion, and the shallowness of these diagnoses have been too clearly exposed for that. Then "clerical vs. liberal" became the watchword, as though the issue was the misuse or purification of religious influence. But this curtain too has been contemptuously pulled aside as the realization dawned, first upon the leading lights of our age, then in ever broadening circles, that the world crisis involves not inequality, self-interest, or justice but a *living person* — involves Him who once swore that he was a King and who for the sake of this royal claim gave up his life on the cross of Golgotha.

"The Nazarene — our holy inspiration, our inspiring ideal, our ideal of piety!" Long have people voiced these generous words. But history has challenged that praise as contradicting the Nazarene's own claims. His calm and crystal-clear divine-human consciousness asserted that he was nothing less than the *Messiah*, the Anointed, and thus the *King* of kings, possessing "all authority in heaven and on earth." Not hero of faith nor "martyr to honor" but *Melek, rex, Basileus ton Ioudaion*, King of the Jews — i.e., *Bearer of Sovereignty* — read the accusation on top of the cross, proclaiming the criminal presumption for which he had to die. Over *this* sovereignty, over the existence or nonexistence of the power of the One born of Mary, the thinking minds, the ruling powers, the engrossed nations are as troubled today as they were in the first three centuries. That *King of the Jews* is either the saving truth to which all peoples say Amen or the principal lie which all peoples should oppose. That is the



Left: Kuyper in 1880.

Below: At Keizersgracht 162, this was from 1885 through 1968 the main building of the university Kuyper founded.



problem of sovereignty as it was once encountered in the blood of the Nazarene and has now again rent apart the whole world of our intellectual, human, and national existence.

What is Sovereignty? Do you not agree when I define it as the authority that has the right, the duty, and the power to break and avenge all resistance to its will? Does not your indestructible folk-conscience tell you too that the original, absolute sovereignty cannot reside in any creature but *must* coincide with God's majesty? If you believe in Him as Deviser and Creator, as Founder and Director of all things, your soul must also proclaim the Triune God as the only absolute Sovereign. Provided — and this I would emphasize — we acknowledge at the same time that this supreme Sovereign once and still delegates his authority to human beings, so that on earth one never directly encounters God Himself in visible things but always sees his sovereign authority exercised in *human* office.

Whence arises the very important question: how does this delegation proceed? Is the all-encompassing sovereignty of God delegated undivided to a single person? Or does an earthly sovereign possess the power to compel obedience only in a limited sphere, a sphere bordered by other spheres in which another is sovereign and not he?

The answer to this question will vary depending on whether you stand within or without the orbit of Revelation. Those whose minds have no place for revelation have always answered: "*insofar as practical*, undivided, and also penetrating *all spheres*." "*Insofar as practical*," because God's sovereignty over what is above falls beyond human reach; over nature, beyond human power; over fate, beyond human control. But for the rest, yes, *without* sphere sovereignty. Let the state have unlimited rule, disposing over persons their lives, their rights, their conscience, even their faith. Once when there were many gods, the *one* unlimited State — through the *vis unita fortior* [united force yields greater strength] — seemed more imposing, more majestic than the *divided* power of the gods. At last the State, embodied in Caesar, itself became God, the god-*"State"* that could tolerate no other states beside itself. Thus the passion for *world* domination. *Divus* Augustus, with Caesarism as its worship. A profoundly sinful notion that was first elaborated for thinking consciousness eighteen centuries later in Hegel's system of the State as "the immanent God."

In contrast Jehovah proclaims to Israel through the voices of Messianic prophecy: "Sovereignty must be delegated not '*insofar as practical*' but *absolutely* undivided and unbroken." That man-Messiah did appear, with power in heaven and power over nature; claiming power over all nations and, *in* all nations, over conscience and faith. Even the bond between mother and child has to yield before his call to obedience. Here

then is *absolute* Sovereignty, extending over all things visible and invisible, over the spiritual and the material, all placed in the hands of one *man*. Not one of the kingdoms but *the* absolute Kingdom. "To be king, for that I was born and for that I came into the world" [John 18:37]. "All authority in heaven and on earth is mine" [Matt. 28:18]. "One day all enemies will be subdued and every knee shall bow before me!" [Rom. 14:11]. That is the Sovereignty of the Messiah which the prophet once foretold, which the Nazarene claimed, which he first demonstrated with miracles, which was described by the apostles, and which the church of Christ confesses, on their authority, to be undivided but nonetheless delegated — or rather, taken over to be given back again. For perfect harmony will break through only when Sovereignty goes back from the Messiah to God himself, who will then be *ta panta en pasi*, that is, "all in all."

But here is the glorious principle of Freedom! This perfect Sovereignty of the *sinless* Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among *sinful* men on earth, and does so by dividing life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty.

Our human life, with its visible material foreground and invisible spiritual background, is neither simple nor uniform but constitutes an infinitely complex organism. It is so structured that the individual exists only in groups, and only in such groups can the whole become manifest. Call the parts of this one great machine "cogwheels," spring-driven on their own axles, or "spheres," each animated with its own spirit. The name or image is unimportant, so long as we recognize that there are in life as many spheres as there are constellations in the sky and that the circumference of each has been drawn on a fixed radius from the center of a unique principle, namely, the apostolic injunction *hekastos en toi idioi tagmati* ["each in its own order": 1 Cor. 15:23]. Just as we speak of a "moral world," a "scientific world," a "business world," the "world of art," so we can more properly speak of a "sphere" of morality, of the family, of social life, each with its own *domain*. And because each comprises its own domain, each has its own Sovereign within its bounds.

There is a domain of nature in which the Sovereign exerts power over matter according to fixed laws. There is also a domain of the personal, of the household, of science, of social and ecclesiastical life, each of which obeys its own laws of life, each subject to its own chief. A realm of thought where only the laws of logic may rule. A realm of conscience where none but the Holy One may give sovereign commands. Finally, a realm of faith where the person alone is sovereign who through that faith consecrates himself in the depths of his being.

The cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of

human life. Hence also rises the danger that one sphere in life may encroach on its neighbor like a sticky wheel that shears off one cog after another until the whole operation is disrupted. Hence also the *raison d'être* for the special sphere of authority that emerged in the State. It must provide for sound mutual interaction among the various spheres, insofar as they are externally manifest, and keep them within just limits. Furthermore, since personal life can be suppressed by the group in which one lives, the state must protect the individual from the tyranny of his own circle. This Sovereign, as Scripture tersely puts it, "gives stability to the land by justice" [Prov. 29:4], for *without* justice it destroys itself and falls. Thus the sovereignty of the State, as the power that protects the individual and defines the mutual relationships among the visible spheres, rises high *above* them by its right to command and compel. But *within* these spheres that does not obtain. There another authority rules, an authority that descends directly from God apart from the State. This authority the State does not *confer* but *acknowledges*. Even in defining laws for the mutual relationships among the spheres, the State may not set its own will as the standard but is *bound* by the choice of a Higher will, as expressed in the nature and purpose of these spheres. The State must see that the wheels operate as intended. Not to suppress life nor to shackle freedom but to make possible the free movement of life in and for every sphere: does not this ideal beckon every nobler head of state?

Thus, two credos stand squarely against each other. He who lives from, and consistently within, the orbit of Revelation confesses that all Sovereignty rests in God and can therefore proceed only from Him; that the Sovereignty of God has been conferred absolute and undivided upon the man-Messiah; and that therefore human freedom is safe under this Son of Man anointed as Sovereign because, along with the State, every other sphere of life recognizes an authority derived from Him — that is, possesses sovereignty in its own sphere.

On the other hand, those who deny special revelation insist on an absolute separation between the question of sovereignty and the question of faith. Consequently they assert that there is no other authority conceivable than that of the State; they strive to embody this high sovereignty ever more perfectly in the supreme State; and they cannot grant to the other spheres a more generous freedom than that which the State permits them out of its weakness or confers out of its supremacy.

I call these *credos* about Sovereignty — life convictions, not theories. For the gulf that separates them lies not in a different arrangement of ideas but in a *recognition* or *denial* of the *facts of life*. For us who live from Revelation, that Messiah lives, that Christ reigns, and as Sovereign He is seated on the throne of God's power more certainly than you are sitting

here in this chancel. Conversely, those who do not *confess* this must *contest* it as a harmful self-delusion that stands in the way of national development, a worthless dogma, a senseless fantasy! These stand, therefore, as diametrically opposing confessions. Again and again, with cowardly half-heartedness they have been shoved behind a long row of hybrid systems, mixed from more of this and less of that or from equal portions of each. But at critical moments the principal *credos* which give even these ghosts some color break through this charade with a vengeance. Then with visors raised they once again challenge each other to combat as the only two mighty antagonists that plumb life down to the root. And so they are worth people risking their own lives for and disturbing the lives of others.

Sphere sovereignty defending itself against State sovereignty: that is the course of world history even back before the Messiah's sovereignty was proclaimed. For though the Royal Child of Bethlehem protects sphere sovereignty with His shield, He did not create it. It existed of old. It lay in the order of creation, in the structure of human life; it was there before State sovereignty arose. But once arisen State sovereignty recognized Sphere sovereignty as a permanent adversary, and within the spheres the power of resistance was weakened by the transgression of their own laws of being, that is, by sin. Thus the ancient history of all people replays a shameful spectacle. Despite stubborn, sometimes heroic struggle, the freedom of the spheres dies out and State power — become Caesarism — triumphs. Socrates drinking the poison cup, Brutus plunging the dagger into Caesar's heart, the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices — these are all the wild, heroic paroxysms of a free organic life that finally collapses under the iron hand of Caesarism. As antiquity drew toward its close there was no freedom left, no nations, no spheres. There was only one sphere, one world empire under one sovereign State. Only by intoxicating itself in an emasculating luxury could a humanity so sunk in self-contempt drive that pain from its heart.

Then Jesus the Nazarene, through the supernatural power of *faith*, once again created a free sphere with a free sovereignty within the iron ring of uniformity. With God in his heart, one with God, himself God, He withstood Caesar, broke down the iron gates, and posited the sovereignty of faith as the deepest piling upon which all sphere sovereignty rests. Neither Pharisee nor disciple understood that His cry "It is finished!" entailed, beyond the salvation of the elect, also a *soteria tou kosmou* [salvation of the cosmos], a liberation of the world, a world of freedoms. But Jesus discerned it. Hence the sign *Basileus* [King] upon His cross. He appeared as Sovereign. As its Sovereign He contended with the usurping "Prince of this World" for authority over that world. And barely had His followers formed their own circle than they also collided

with State sovereignty. They succumbed. Their blood flowed. But Jesus' sovereign principle of faith was not thereby washed away. *Deus* Christus or *Divus* Augustus became the shibboleths that would determine the fate of the world. Christ won and Caesar was toppled. The liberated nations each emerged with its own king, and within those dominions separate spheres, and within those spheres distinct liberties. Then began that glorious life, crowned with nobility, exhibiting in the ever richer organism of guilds and orders and free communities all the energy and glory that sphere sovereignty implies.

This was more pronounced in our dear fatherland than elsewhere. It seemed that the country could defend sphere sovereignty more forcefully against State sovereignty when divided into separate polder districts than when all one. So Philip discovered when the singers of the Souterlied and the leaders of the hedge-preachers clashed, despite themselves, with State sovereignty.⁴ So also the Stuarts and Bourbons learned in the following century when the immortal sea hero whose mausoleum we see before us, our glorious De Ruyter, withstood the rising royalism of the Charleses and Louises on every sea and broke it on every shore.⁵ "Next to God I am captain of my ship!" was the dauntless passion for liberty that inspired our whole phalanx of sea heroes along with him. It carried in seamen's terms on all the waters of monarchical pretension something of what in legal language is called "sphere sovereignty."

Alas! before a century had passed even our country fell away. Our Holland too sank away in sin, and with our republic fell the last bulwark of freedom on Europe's shore. And so the tide of royalism rose. It began to tread upon the countries, trample the peoples, torment the nations. Finally, in the most inflammable of the nations the fire of vengeance was kindled. Passions flared, the principle of Revolution took off the head of the crowned sovereign to crown the people sovereign. A terrifying event,

4. King Philip II of Spain (1527-98) tried to suppress the Dutch Reformation and the movement for political independence associated with it. Hedge-preachers carried on the Protestant cause against this repression by holding meetings in fields and barns. There and elsewhere the Protestants sang the *Souter Liedekens*, a Flemish psalter composed by Jacobus Clemens in 1556.

5. The Bourbons and Stuarts were the royal houses of France and England, respectively, in the seventeenth century. Louis XIV of France (1643-1715) was the epitome of royal absolutism and mounted perennial invasions of the Rhineland, to which the House of Orange led the opposition. Charles II (1630-85) restored the monarchy to England after the protectorate of the Puritan Oliver Cromwell and prosecuted naval warfare against the Netherlands. In the second (1665-67) and third (1672-74) phases of the conflict Michiel Adriaanszoon de Ruyter (1607-76), admiral of the Dutch fleet, achieved famous and brilliant victories. De Ruyter's tomb is in the Nieuwe Kerk where Kuyper was speaking.

born from a thirst for freedom, born also from a hatred for the Messiah, that only put freedom in tighter straits! For the sovereign people of that one election day found itself, courtesy of the ballot box, under an absolute and unwilling guardianship the next. First it was the Jacobins, then the Napoleonic Caesar, a little later the nice-looking State ideal that was rushed into place in France and more leisurely advocated as just and "enlightened" in Germany.

So liberty once again lay in disgrace, and for a second time a single sovereignty threatened to swallow up all other sovereignties. What *then* saved the day? Not the restoration spirit of the Congress of Vienna. Not Haller's or De Maistre's idolization of princes. Not the historical school whose physiological views smothered any higher principle. Not even the pseudo-constitutional system with its *roi fainéant* and tyrannizing factions.⁶ It was truly the Messiah, the Sovereign seated at God's right hand, Who poured out a spirit of grace, of prayer, of faith upon the peoples through the purest revival that ever awakened them.⁷ That created again a separate sphere where another sovereign than an earthly power was worshiped. A circle which reckoned with the soul, which practiced mercy, which inspired the states "not as citizens but as confessors of the Gospel." Not by political manipulation but by moral power there was born from within the soul a hope for the nations. Not to rule but to serve there arose also in our fatherland a people who believed in the Messiah, a "Christian group," in spite of itself a national party. Not a faction, i.e., a contrived group; not a fraction, i.e., a splinter group; but a *people's* party, i.e., a part of the people, a segment of what constitutes the whole, so that, if possible, from this temporary division the whole, the majestic unity of the people might again be inspired by a higher ideal.

... [In a paragraph deleted here, Kuyper briefly reviews the previous thirty years of the Dutch Antirevolutionary movement.]

Thus we contended for the indivisibility of sovereign authority. For the States-General standing *beside* and *with*, not *in* or *under* the government. Thus we did not maintain a deterrence theory but God's sovereign

6. Karl Ludwig von Haller (1768-1854) was a Swiss-German statesman and political theorist who championed traditional monarchy and hierarchy in the Restoration period. Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) was an arch-Catholic and royal absolutist during and after the French Revolution. The "historical school" was founded by Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779-1861), professor of law at the University of Berlin, who held that the law is the product of a people's particular spirit (*volkgeist*) historically developed. By "pseudo-constitutional system" Kuyper means the "July" or "bourgeois" (he calls it the "lazy") monarchy of Louis Philippe in France, 1830-48, which was marked by intense factional discord in the Chamber of Deputies.

7. Kuyper means the *Réveil* of 1815-60.

vengeance on whoever dared to shed man's blood. Thus we protested against the compulsory inoculation of our children. Thus we prophesied the emancipation of the church. And thus, finally, we focused all our fight on the school struggle.⁸ For there the sovereignty of conscience, and of the family, and of pedagogy, and of the spiritual circle were all equally threatened. And because a principle, sowing seed according to its kind, *cannot* rest until *all* its seeds are sprouting in a scientifically ordered coherence; and because a people, arising for such a principle, *may* not desist until it has raised the fruit of knowledge from the root of faith; and because so concentrated a knowledge can be cultivated only in a school with university aspirations — so it *had* to come. By the iron necessity of an inner life-impulse what we see today had to come: the launching of this vessel, small and unseaworthy to be sure, but chartered under the sovereignty of King Jesus and expecting to show in every port of knowledge the flag of "sphere sovereignty"!

II. Its Scholarly Aspirations

You may also expect "sphere sovereignty" to be the signature of our *academic work*. This too I take up from the practical side: it leads not to abstract, dry scholasticism but to firmness of principle, depth of insight, clarity of judgment — in a word, to sanctified intellectual power, a power to resist whatever superior force would limit freedom in and of our human life.

Do not forget that every State power tends to look upon all liberty with a suspicious eye. The various spheres of life cannot do without the State sphere, for just as one space can limit another, so one sphere can limit another unless the State fixes their boundaries by law. The State is the *sphere of spheres*, which encircles the whole extent of human life. Therefore, in a nobler sense, not for itself but on behalf of the other spheres, it seeks to strengthen its arm and with that outstretched arm to resist, to try to break, any sphere's drive to expand and dominate a wider domain. But now again, look at the signs of the times. Hasn't Mommsen himself, in the bold image that he painted of Caesar, returned to the imperialistic line drawn by that Caesar as the standard for political wisdom in our day? Does the chancellor of Germany strike you as a

8. Kuyper is here reciting some of the chief points of the Antirevolutionary Party's platform: maintenance of capital punishment, *voluntary* vaccination against disease, separation of church and state, and equitable funding of religious as well as "public" school systems.

liberty-lover? How about the man so profoundly humiliated by that chancellor at Sedan? "Freedom-loving" or "tyrannical": what is your impression of the people's tribune that has replaced the man of Sedan in popular influence at the French capital?⁹

It *had to be* so, as the discipline and the cure for the cowardly and emasculated nation whose atrophy of moral resilience made it possible for their freedoms to knuckle under. The State is now again the supreme power on earth. There is no earthly power above the State that can compel the Sovereign to do justice. So whether from a base lust for power or from a noble solicitude for the *common good*, every State by its very nature will draw the iron band as tightly around the staves as the crimp of those staves allows. Ultimately, therefore, it depends on the life-spheres themselves whether they will flourish in freedom or groan under State coercion. With moral tensile strength they *cannot* be pushed in, they will not *permit* themselves to be cramped. But servility, once it's become shackled, has lost even the right to complain.

Right here is the sore spot. *Sin* threatens freedom within each sphere just as strongly as *State-power* does at the boundary. To tighten the band around the staves, one lights a fire inside the barrel; that fire within causes them to shrink much more than hammer blows without. So it is with our liberties. At the heart of every sphere there smolders and smokes the flame of passion, whence the sparks of sin fly upward. That unholy blaze undermines the moral vitality of life, weakens resiliency, and finally bends the strongest stave. In any successful attack on freedom the state can only be an accomplice. The *chief* culprit is the citizen who forgets his duty, wastes away his strength in the sleep of sin and sensual pleasure, and so loses the power of his own initiative. Among a nation healthy at its core, whose people still live soundly in the various spheres, no state can subvert the principles of justice without meeting the people's strong moral resistance under God. Only when discipline weakened and affluence slipped in and sin became brazen could theory bend what was enfeebled and Napoleon kick in the decrepit. And if God had not time and again poured vigor into those lifeless spheres, sometimes under pressure —

9. Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) was the preeminent German historian of Roman antiquity. His work, including *Römische Geschichte* (3 vols., 1854-56) and *Römische Staatsrecht* (3 vols., 1876-88), endorsed the early emperors despite their ruthlessness and his own liberal sympathies, perhaps because of Mommsen's stronger pan-German commitments. Otto von Bismarck had been chancellor of Prussia, then Germany, since 1862 and had woven the diplomatic-military web that trapped Napoleon III of France at the battle of Sedan (2 September 1870). This defeat ended the French Second Empire and prompted republican proposals, a radical version of which was put forward by the popular and charismatic Leon Gambetta (1838-82).

Kuyper expanded on his assertion of the importance of higher education some twenty years later, just before his own election as prime minister confirmed, perhaps, the thesis he laid out.

[In light of the conflict that inevitably arises in the scholarly realm,] believers may not withdraw to the precincts of the church, rest content with their own faith, and leave the construction of the temple of learning to unbelievers as if it is no concern of their own. They may not because scholarly research is not a matter of human pride but a God-given duty. The honor of God demands that the human mind penetrate the entire system of creation to discover His greatness and wisdom there and to translate these into human thought through human words. Since the knowledge of the unbelieving world cannot help but obscure God's greatness and wisdom, it is the Christian thinkers' calling to buckle down to this enormous task which they alone can accomplish, even if it did not yield benefit for their own life.

But the latter is not at all the case. On the contrary, thinking Christians can arrive at a conception of things that harmonizes with their faith, that supports and strengthens it instead of undermining it, only when Christian learning inducts us into a well-considered, clearly articulated world- and life-view. A confessing Christian who lives amid this world cannot be satisfied with a profession of faith but, like anyone, needs a firm understanding of the world in which he lives. Without the guidance of Christian scholarship, he cannot help but absorb the conclusions of unbelievers. Doing so, he will live with a world- and life-view that does not fit but comes into conflict with his confession on any number of points. His thinking will divide into two, the content of his confession and the frame of

changing atoms into dynamos, as the latest philosophy has it¹⁰ — the last distinct sphere would long since have broken down and nothing would remain of our freedom but the "sic transit" on its grave.

10. Kuyper is probably invoking the German Idealist *Naturphilosophie* in which atoms were viewed first of all as centers of force rather than as material entities. Matter then became a state of dynamic equilibrium between opposing forces. My thanks to Arie Leegwater for this explanation.

his scholarly operations lying unreconciled next to each other. That shatters his unity of consciousness and so also his power. It has the inevitable result as well that his faith gradually makes room for his scientific views, and that he unnoticeably drifts over to the unbelieving point of view. In the nineteenth century this took the form of a mixed sensibility, like the Ethical school in this country, which tried to unite a few parts faith with a few parts unbelieving philosophy into one whole. It nonetheless remained a hybrid.

By contrast, it is our duty to take hold of scholarship as an instrument for propagating our convictions. We can often see how a Christian group that does not feel this obligation isolates itself from the general public, locks itself up in a corner, and maintains itself among the less educated parts of the population but loses all influence over the course of events and public opinion. Naturally, the learned give this habit their stamp of approval. The universities mark out the direction that the thinking of people of influence will take. From the universities it spreads out among politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and writers, and from these into the press, the primary and secondary schools, the civil service. If university life and its broad influence remain exclusively in the hands of unbelievers, public opinion — also on moral and religious matters — will one day go wholesale in this direction and work to the great detriment of our Christian circles. There is only one way to parry this, and that is for Christian thinkers to found a university that will unfold another world of seeing and thinking; to transmit this among those who pursue higher education; and so to raise a circle of educated, influential people who can turn the public way of thinking. . . .

De Gemeene Gratie in Wetenschap en Kunst, pp. 36-37

Among the means that God has granted nobler peoples to defend their liberties, scholarship often stands at the forefront. Among the spokesmen of the Holy Spirit the man of Tarsus was the academically trained, and it was from that Pauline treasure chest, not from the mystical John nor from the practical James, that Luther drew the freedom of the Reformation. I well know that learning can betray liberty and has done so more than once, but this was despite and not by virtue of its sacred mission. In its authentic form God sent it to us as an angel of light.

For what robs the lunatic, the idiot, the drunkard of their human respect? Is it not precisely the absence of *clear consciousness*? To come to clearer knowledge not only of ourselves but also of that outside ourselves — is not that *the science*? Thinking after God what He has thought before and about and in us? The being- and life-consciousness not of a single person but of humanity through all the ages! To be able to think of something that is, and thus to be able to put together in our reason what is mirrored in our consciousness, is an honor bestowed by God on our human existence. To possess wisdom is a divine trait in our being. Indeed, the power of wisdom and knowledge extends so far that the course of things usually runs not according to reality but according to how people conceive of reality. Who would say that ideas are unimportant? Ideas shape public opinion; that opinion, the sense of justice; and that sense, the thawing or congealing of spiritual life. Therefore, whoever expects his principles to exert influence cannot simply float about in feelings, does not advance by fancy, and even with his [religious/theological] confession comes only halfway. He gains a hold on the public only if he has also attained power in the world of thought, if he can transfer his *inner* urge, the “*Deus in nobis*,” from what he *senses* to what he *knows*.

Provided that — and I hold to this strongly — provided that scholarship remains “Sovereign in its own sphere” and does not degenerate under the guardianship of Church or State. Scholarship creates its *own* life sphere in which truth is sovereign. Under no circumstances may violation of its life-law be tolerated. That would not only dishonor scholarship but be sin before God. Our consciousness is like a mirror in us, reflecting images from three worlds: from the world *around* us, from the world of *our own being*, and from the invisible world of *the spirits*. Reason thus demands (1) that we let each of these worlds reflect those images according to its own nature, or *aisthesis* [sense perception]; (2) that we receive those images with a clear eye, or *noesis* [intelligent thought]; and (3) that we make a harmonious summary of what has been perceived, or *gnosis* [knowledge, wisdom]. Not contemplation, therefore, but a reflection in us. Knowledge that makes wise. From life for life. Ending in adoration of the only wise God!

Spinoza grasped the sovereignty of learning in its own sphere, and therefore, measured on a moral scale, our admiration for Spinoza’s character is as great as our disapproval of the insipid Erasmus.¹¹ Both organ

11. Baruch Spinoza, the eminent seventeenth-century Dutch Jewish philosopher, accepted excommunication from his Amsterdam synagogue rather than retract his views. By contrast, in Kuyper’s view, the sixteenth-century Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus had compromised his convictions rather than side with the Protestant Reformation.

and perception were faulty with Spinoza, so his conclusion had to be false as well. But seeing what he did and as he did, he steadfastly refused to lend himself to a violation of the sovereignty of learning in its own sphere. *That* a truly Reformed person does not censure but places high above the wavering hesitation which has tempted many who knew what Spinoza never knew into an unprincipled compromise. We must therefore resist tooth and nail any imposition upon learning by the church of Christ. At the real risk of suffering at its hands, the church must insist that learning never become a slave but maintain its due sovereignty upon its own ground and live by the grace of God. There is certainly the satanic danger that some among the learned will degenerate into devils of pride and tempt learning to arrogate unto itself things outside its sphere. But a tall steeple cannot be scaled without the constant danger of a great fall. Further, what we just said about the tyranny of the state also applies to the tyranny of learning: it cannot occur unless the church declines spiritually first, so that when it wakes up spiritually again, the church itself will urge the learning that chastised it in God’s name back to its rightful place.

Not wholly but nearly the same may be said of the State. Not wholly, because the State — given the power to define its sphere of justice — still remains the master planner for the sphere of learning insofar as this assumes visible form in the schools. But before it crosses the boundary into the domain of scholarship, the State respectfully “takes the shoes off from its feet” and lays aside a sovereignty which would not be seemly on that terrain. To make learning the servant of the State as the Ghibellines did over against the Guelphs, as the French bureaucracy did to control its own people, as German reaction sought to do in the shame of Göttingen¹² — this is a self-demeaning prostitution that forfeits every valid claim to moral influence. But even if the State is inspired by a nobler aim, as is our own regime; even if, as in our country, learning is too proud to stoop; still, learning in our realm will flourish and attain honor if university life grows up again from its own root and into its own life and so outgrows the guardianship of the State. So once stood the schools of the prophets in Israel and the school of wisdom in Jerusalem: free in the

12. The Ghibellines and Guelphs were, respectively, pro-imperial and pro-papal factions in southern Germany and northern Italy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Their long and vicious rivalry compromised the integrity of many institutions, including the educational, under their successive eras in power. The French government had asserted control over the universities both before, during, and after the Revolution. The “shame of Göttingen” was the 1837 dismissal of seven professors from the university there over their protest against the king of Hanover’s abrogation of the constitution.

midst of the people. So stood the schools of ancient philosophy in Greece and of their imitators in Rome. So, free, the schools of the first Christian scholars once appeared, as did the ancient universities of Bologna and Paris. Not as vessels within the structure of State into which knowledge was to be poured, but knowledge that had entered into life and there created its own form. In that free form the university could work in the liberation of the Reformation. Only late in the last century was this free band conjured into being a "branch of the civil service" as the new-model university let itself be attached as an organ of the State.

This came not by the arbitrary work of one person but from the press of events and the enervation of the people. It would border on the absurd to demand that the State now suddenly relinquish its hold on the university world. At present the public shows too little desire for knowledge, the wealthy too little generosity, and the alumni too little energy to hazard the attempt. For the time being the State *must* continue its support, provided — we insist — that it works only for the liberation that would have scholarship again seize "sovereignty in its own sphere."

Is it foolish then that our School should take a first, timid step in this better direction? At the state-university the scale of equity is tilted by so many weights. It cannot be said often enough: money creates power *for* the one who gives *over* the one who receives. Hence, art (except for music) can never permanently elevate popular liberty, for it needs gold. Who can gauge the influence State funds have wrought upon the destiny of the nation and the course of scholarship by the single appointment of a Thorbecke, a Scholten, an Opzoomer?¹³ Where is the spiritual criterion to guide the State in making so influential a choice for the higher, most decisive disciplines? Besides, when Jews and Roman Catholics are compelled to contribute to the support of a theological faculty that in fact is and must remain Protestant, is not the sense of justice offended? So when the law of the land recognizes our right to have our own institution, and the Sovereign of the land — as we have just heard — takes our free, unencumbered institution under the protection of justice, then does not a university supported by the people themselves offer a beautiful prophecy for learning and for national life?

Here is a group belittled as a "night school" not even thirty years

13. Johan Rudolph Thorbecke (1798-1872), as professor of law at the University of Leiden, published the work that inspired the new Dutch Constitution of 1848; a political liberal, he served three terms as prime minister. Johannes Henricus Scholten (1811-85) was Kuyper's most influential professor at Leiden and the father of theological modernism in the Netherlands. Cornelis Willem Opzoomer (1821-92) was professor of philosophy at the University of Utrecht and the flagbearer of liberal humanism in nineteenth-century Dutch letters, culture, and religion.

Kuyper also considered the proposal that a few chairs be reserved for Christian instructors at secular universities. He acknowledged that this would give a port of refuge to students whose faith was floundering.

But it would do nothing to direct scholarship, which would remain on an incorrect basis. Then everyone would get the impression that real science proceeds from the unbelieving world, that there it receives its power and urge, that there its temple is built, and that the Christian religion has no higher calling than to exercise some criticism here and there and, if possible, to offer a little correction. The tree would still be bad, still grow from a cankered root, and all we would do on our side is cut off some useless shoots, weed out some nettles, and here and there drape the branches with some plucked flowers that are destined to wither away before people notice them.

No, what we need is . . . a plant of scholarship growing from a Christian root. To satisfy ourselves with the role of sauntering around another garden, clipper in hand, is to throw away the dignity of the Christian religion.

De Gemeene Gratie in Wetenschap en Kunst, p. 41

ago now pouring its energies toward an academic goal! The least respected of the "non-thinking" part of the nation come running from the plow and the feed-trough to collect money to build a university.¹⁴ Elsewhere people expect progress from *above*; learning is to be brought *to* the people. Is not there something better in a group that will sacrifice its pleasures so that learning may bloom? Is this not a practical solution to the problem of connecting learning to life? Must not scholars who are supported by the people's money grow closer to the people and more averse to all that is dry and abstract? Besides, is not *giving* itself a power and the ability to part with money a moral asset? Who then can assess the moral capital that will accrue to our people precisely through this costly institution?

14. Kuyper is here quoting epithets his movement received from its cultured despisers. The institutional roots of the Free University go back to a night school Kuyper and his associates ran for people of their own persuasion who were unable to pursue the ordinary university route. The "non-thinking part of the nation" was a particularly egregious description of stout Calvinists by (in Kuyper's retort) "smug liberals."

People complain about a lack of character, but what will better form character than such free initiative on the part of vigilant citizens? If elsewhere the wheels of the university run oh so smoothly by the compulsion of tax assessors and the allowance of paymasters, we shall not be envious. For with us precisely "the struggle for life" generates the power of glorious devotion. In the money entrusted to us lies something more, something higher than the intrinsic worth of the metal. In the gold that flows into our coffers there is prayer, there is love, and the sweat of the brow.

III. As a Reformed Principle

We have seen how "sphere sovereignty" is the stimulus that gave birth to our institution, and we have frankly stated that for us "sphere sovereignty" is also the royal stipulation for all scholarship that would flourish. It remains for me to plead a disputed case, that we be granted "sphere sovereignty" as our *principle* — a *Reformed* principle. . . . [Kuyper argues for the necessity of differentiating among traditions within Christianity and of assigning each the label duly accorded them in and by history. Within those parameters he uses "Reformed."] We do not thereby reject our Lutheran brethren. To look down on other Christians would be to our blame. We simply ask that we not be compelled to exchange something that we consider finer for something less excellent, and that we be permitted to rebuild on the ruins a Reformed temple in pure Reformed style.

For such I am contending in this discourse. And so, according to the demands of Scripture and the precedent of Calvin, I have placed in the foreground the *Sovereignty of God*, for it alone stimulates life down to the root and overcomes all fear of man, even of Satan himself. Should anyone ask whether "sphere sovereignty" is really derived from the heart of Scripture and the treasury of Reformed life, I would entreat him first of all to plumb the depths of the organic *faith principle* in Scripture, further to note Hebron's tribal law for David's coronation, to notice Elijah's resistance to Ahab's tyranny, the disciples' refusal to yield to Jerusalem's police regulations, and, not least, to listen to their Lord's maxim concerning what is God's and what is Caesar's. As to Reformed life, don't you know about Calvin's "lesser magistrates"?¹⁵ Isn't sphere sovereignty the basis of the entire presbyterian church order? Did not almost all

15. Kuyper treats these at some length in *Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties* (see above).

Reformed nations incline toward a confederative form of government? Are not civil liberties most luxuriantly developed in Reformed lands? Can it be denied that domestic peace, decentralization, and municipal autonomy are best guaranteed even today among the heirs of Calvin?

Thus it is entirely within the Reformed spirit that we now ask for the sovereignty of our principle in our own scholarly sphere. We may not make a pact of neutrality with learning that proceeds from another principle, or sit at the same university table. I do not deny that among non-Christian authorities there exists a fear of God and of his justice, a fear that Calvin honored even among pagan tyrants; yet such a pious trait is nothing more than a foundation with at most a partial wall but without a roof or windows. Or if you prefer a more exact image, of what use is a tower that lacks the spire and therefore the carillon, clock, and weather-vane — in short, everything for which it is built! More acceptable is the proposal that advocates a large State academy for which the authorities would provide nothing but lecture halls with podiums as well as museums and laboratories, and in which every scholar had the right to appear and every group the right to place its own scholars. An academic Central Station, where all lines would converge but each with its own direction and administration. But even here the royal right of each principle to "sovereignty in its own sphere" would be violated on both sides. Does not history teach that scholarship takes a different shape among every circle with its own principle? There was once a Greek, an Arabic, a Scholastic learning which, though not speaking to us, was duly developed in its own place by giant intellects in whose shadow none of us could stand. Likewise, after the Middle Ages, learning showed a readily distinguishable face at Catholic and non-Catholic universities. The succession of philosophers who appeared with and after Kant established schools of thought that were mutually exclusive, in accordance with their stress on the subjective or objective. How would you wed a monist to an atomist? So compelling and dominating is the strength of a principle that Hegel's intellectual power, everyone concedes, could bring forth an entire distinctive system — for theology, jurisprudence, physics, in every domain — so that to learn criminal law in Hegel's school and civil law in Herbart's will utterly confuse one's sense of justice.¹⁶

If it is impossible to weave a single garment because of a difference in *thought-principle*, how glaring the necessity of sphere sovereignty in the case of *life-principle*! As Fichte's example shows, so long as only

16. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) was a German philosopher and educational theorist who postulated a Realist theory of mind and ethics. He negatively reviewed Hegel's (Idealist) *Philosophy of Right* (i.e., law) upon its publication in 1821.

Toward the end of his career, Kuyper reflected on the wholesale emergence of separate Christian organizations in the Netherlands, of which the Free University had been an early signal. The mixture of biblical argumentation and pragmatic reflection is typical of his thinking, and his sketch of motives summarizes several decades of Dutch Reformed social history.

This excerpt is from *Pro Rege, of het Koningschap van Christus*, vol. III (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1912), pp. 184-94, and was translated by John Vriend.

The third instrument [after church and Christian school] that Christ uses to maintain his Kingship over society is the system of Christian societies that those who confess Him have called into being in differentiation from other social organizations. . . . This separation of Christian people into their own organizations is already being pursued in the Netherlands, just as it came about from the Roman Catholic side in other countries as well. Still, the reality does not relieve us of the task of examining on principle the legitimacy or illegitimacy of this separation. We need to know whether we are on the right track in this matter and to what rule we must hold ourselves. . . .

[After a lengthy biblical justification from 1 Corinthians 6:1-16, Kuyper reflects on the social experience that animated and ensued from such organization.]

[Yet] it is still regularly asserted even among us that this [scriptural] rule no longer generally applies. We no longer live in a

thought-principle is involved, one can return to what was originally rejected.¹⁷ But with a life-principle, that is impossible. That is rooted in facts. Or to put it more strongly, in a living person. In a person whose appearance precipitated a crisis in the middle of the world, at the midpoint of world history, also in the center of the world's thought. Ask that living

17. Johan Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was a leading German philosopher and successor of Kant. In the first phase of his career he asserted the precedence of ethics or moral law over religion but later reversed that priority and developed a mystical philosophical theology.

pagan society, it is correctly pointed out, but in a society still based on Christian principles. Furthermore, there are common interests that one can defend and do justice to only in cooperation with other involved parties. We agree with this in the abstract. Indeed, in times past no one thought about the issue of separate organizations: people either did not organize or organized without regard to religious differences. The question is only whether that earlier situation has not gradually changed in a very unfavorable way. It can hardly be denied that the mind of the world has increasingly pushed in all directions to organize on a basis that, unfortunately, can never be ours. Especially in the social question a spirit of anarchism and socialism has progressively established itself, setting a tone that turns these organizations into propaganda organs for unholy revolutionary principles. Granted, alongside these anarchistic and socialistic organizations a number of more neutral ones have also surfaced, but these too are almost universally led by men who let it be clearly known how intensely they oppose the positive confession of our Christian faith. The influence that comes from these organizations is thus almost always destructive to our Christian confession. Their members reason and act on the basis of principles diametrically opposed to our own.

Now if people join such organizations and mix with those who think along very different lines, then what *they* think and believe becomes the starting-point for decisions. By their membership in these organizations people thus support things that, based on their Christian confession, they ought to oppose. . . . The leadership in such bodies is never in Christian hands but invariably and unalterably in our adversaries'. They stubbornly

person, that Christ, or his authoritative interpreters; what do you learn? Does the Rabbi of Nazareth declare that *his* knowledge is wedded to that of earthly sages? Do his apostles tell you that graduate studies at Jerusalem or Athens will naturally and gradually lead to his higher knowledge? No, just the opposite. That Rabbi insists that *his* treasure of wisdom has been hidden from the wise and learned and revealed to babes. And the academically trained Paul draws a gulf so wide, so deep, so impassable between his earlier, acquired knowledge and the life-principle now implanted that time and again he contrasts the *foolish* thought of the one with the *wise* life of the other.

promote their ideas, aims, and schemes, and those of us who embark on their vessels will inevitably end up where we never should. There our principle is rendered inoperative, loses its vigor, and is pushed into a corner. In some confederative setup a certain degree of cooperation may be conceivable to advance some common interests, but mingling with leaders of a different mindset in the same organization always results in a bitterly disappointing fiasco for Christian principle, yielding victory for them and defeat for us.

If one simply ignores these realities and joins such an organization anyway, the additional danger arises that "bad company corrupts good character" [1 Cor. 15:33]. In the case of the organizations we have in mind here, material interests invariably are primary. The purpose is to gain more power against employers and higher wages for one's labor. Now by itself there is nothing wrong in asserting one's own rights and attempting to improve one's material position. That is life's law of self-preservation which cannot be ignored in any sphere. But precisely for that reason there is a strong temptation in such organizations, also for Christians, to let the end justify the means, to give priority to material interests over spiritual ones, to drift along with others on a current which can and may never be ours. . . . [In such unions] one cannot defend himself spiritually and, before knowing it, absorbs views and ideas that cannot stand the test of the Christian confession. People then yield without wanting to yield. They go along without considering where it will end. . . .

This threat has been felt so deeply among Christian groups in every area of life that distinct Christian societies or organizations

have sprung up almost spontaneously, and in great numbers. As a result we have our own Young Men's Societies, our Girls' and Women's Societies, our Boys' Clubs, our labor unions, our associations of clerks, our Civil Servants' Unions, our choral societies, our music societies, our students' associations. In short, virtually every social domain has given rise to confessional organizations and established separate societies.

These people had first tried to be members in mixed organizations but could not remain in them. Life itself forced separation. People clashed at every point. The conflict asserted itself in almost every discussion and decision. People felt they were too far apart to be able to work together. They almost got a sense of liberation when at last they met on their own ground, no longer had to wage the exhausting struggle against the other-minded, could strengthen each other in upholding their own principle, and could jointly invoke the blessing of the Lord upon their work. The principled separation that should have come from the church but, in large part, could no longer come into its own there sprang up with vigor and with correctly marked boundaries out of the free life of society, first in the area of education, then in the sphere of social organizations. The overall situation in society became healthy again. Christian principle could again make itself heard, could again find application, could again take a considered position over against the principle urged by the mind of the world. . . . The formerly silent could now stand up for their principle and witness to their faith. Life again became delightful. The application of faith in practice was studied on all sides . . . and through practice people again supported each other in their most holy faith.

Shall we then pretend to grow from the selfsame root that which, according to the express pronouncement of Jesus' divine self-consciousness, is rooted entirely differently? We shall *not* risk it, ladies and gentlemen! Rather, considering that something begins from principle [*met een beginsel iets begint*] and that a distinct entity takes rise from a distinct principle, we shall maintain a distinct sovereignty for our own principle and for that of our opponents across the whole sphere of thought. That is to say, as from their principle and by a method appropriate to it they erect a house of knowledge that glitters but does not entice us, so we too from our principle and by its corresponding method will let our own

trunk shoot up whose branches, leaves, and blossoms are nourished with its own sap. Once again we claim to value something as true that our opponents label as self-deception. So be it. It is necessary for us to be regarded as fools since we cannot refrain from saying with the poet of Proverbs that "the godless of our age do not understand wisdom" [Prov. 29:7].¹⁸ Not that he is our inferior in knowledge; he is probably our

18. The text of Kuyper's *Staten-Bijbel* is markedly different from that of most modern versions: "The righteous take note of the case of the poor, but the godless do not understand/grasp knowledge."

superior. But because he takes to be *no* fact that which for us stands *fast* as fact in Christ. He declares *not* to have found in his soul what the consciousness of our soul has grasped. Faith in God's Word, objectively infallible in Scripture and subjectively offered to us by the Holy Spirit — there is the line of demarcation. Not as if the knowledge of others rests on intellectual certainty and ours only on faith. For all knowledge proceeds from faith of whatever kind. You lean on God, you proceed from your own ego, or you hold fast to your ideal. The person who does not believe does not exist. At the very least, one who had nothing standing immediately firm before him could not find a point for his thinking to even begin. And how could someone whose thinking lacked a starting point ever investigate something *scientifically*?

We propose therefore to build alongside of what others have built without anything in common except the yard outside, the view from the windows, and a press which, like the mail, maintains the exchange of thought. For we certainly acknowledge that a battle of ideas is possible and necessary, again and again, but never over anything but *starting point* and *direction*. Once these are defined, then, provided you draw straight, the design of your line is determined. Your stance to the left or right makes everything look different and deprives any argument raised against you of persuasive power. Any organic thinker rightly scoffs at the atomistic pretension that everyone, growing up, must think through all systems, search through every confession, and then choose the one he considers the best. No one can do this, and no one does. Neither the time nor the mental energy is available. Only some naif, who does not yet understand higher learning, can fancy that he or someone else has accomplished this. Such sampling of all systems merely fosters superficiality, destroys thinking, spoils character, and renders the brain unfit for more solid labor. Believe me, a firm understanding of architecture does not come from nosing about in the alleys behind the houses but from a careful examination of one well-built structure, basement to attic.

Our scholarship will be "free," therefore, not in the sense of "detached from its principle." That would be the freedom of the fish on dry land, of a flower uprooted from the soil, of a Drentse day-laborer taken out of his village and suddenly set down in Fleet Street or the Strand. We bind ourselves in our own house strictly and inexorably to a fixed regimen, convinced that every home runs best under definite rules. For the most generous freedom in the realm of learning is established when the door is open for whomever would leave, when no outsider may enter *your* house to lord it over you, but also when everyone can freely build on the foundation of *his own* principle, in the style of *his own* method, with the cornice being the results of *his own* research.

Finally, if you ask whether we want this separate development not only for theology but for all the disciplines, and if you can scarcely control a smile when someone scoffs at "Christian medicine" and "Christian logic," then listen to our reply to that objection. Do you think that we would confess God's revelation — reformed, after its deformation — as the starting point of our efforts and draw upon this source only as theologians, scorning it as artists, jurists, and students of letters? Can you think of a science worthy of the name whose knowledge is divided up into cubbyholes?

What do people mean by the *medical* faculty? It is not a sick mammal that medical science would help but a person created in the image of God. Judge for yourself, then. Depending upon whether you view that person to be or not to be a moral agent, with a higher destiny for body and soul, bound to God's Word, will you conceal or tell him of his approaching death? Recommend or advise against anesthesia for the woman in labor? Compel vaccination or leave it to free choice? Urge self-control or indulgence for passionate youth? Curse the mother's fertility with Malthus or bless it with Scripture? Counsel the psychologically distressed or drug them? Do you condone cremation? Unconditionally permit vivisection? Would you arrest the syphilis virus in our society at the cost of dishonoring authority and offending human dignity by means of the most detestable of all medical examinations?

What about the *law* school? Do you see the human being as a self-developing product of nature or as a condemned sinner? Is the law a functionally developing organ of nature or a jewel coming down to us from God himself, bound to His Word? [Depending on your answer] will not criminal law have another purpose and international law another guide? When, outside of academe, the Christian conscience finds itself opposing the prevailing political economy, current business practices, and the rapacious nature of social relationships; when, in civil life, all our Christian people urge a return to decentralization by way of "sphere sovereignty"; when, under constitutional law, separate Christian schools have appeared by a three-to-one margin [over against neutral schools]¹⁹ — then can you name one chair on the law faculty that would not be struck by this conflict of principles?

I readily grant that if our *natural sciences* strictly limited themselves to weighing and measuring, the wedge of principle would not be at the door. But who would do that? What natural scientist operates without a hypothesis? Does not everyone who practices science as a *man* and not

19. Kuyper is referring to the high rate at which Christian schools were founded in the Netherlands after the mobilization campaign of 1879.

as a *measuring stick* view things through a subjective lens and always fill in the unseen part of the circle according to subjective opinion? Can someone assess the higher value of the book you published, your pamphlet, your collection of songs, who reckons only the cost of the paper and the amount of ink used in the printing? Is the value of the finest piece of embroidery calculated by the cost of the canvas and a few strands of silk? Or if you prefer: if the whole of creation lies before the natural scientist's eyes as one enchanting painting, is the beauty of the work then to be appreciated by the gold frame around it, the yards of canvas under it, the pounds of paint upon it?

What shall I say about the faculty of *letters*? Of course, "learning to read" and the "declension" of words has nothing to do with being for or against the Messiah. But as I go on and open up Hellas's palace of art or enter Rome's world of power, does it not matter whether I recall the spirit of those peoples again to banish the spirit of Christ or to put them in subjection to the spirit of Christ, according to both human and divine estimation? Does not the study of Semitic languages change depending upon whether I regard Israel as *the* people of *absolute* revelation or merely as a people with a genius for piety? Does philosophy remain the same whether it pursues the "ideal being" or joins us in confessing Christ as the ideal "made flesh"? Will world history come to the same conclusion irrespective of identifying the Cross with Socrates' cup of poison or viewing it as the center point of all history? And, to say no more, will the history of our fatherland kindle the same fire in the heart of youth with Fruin or Nuyens as it was unfolded in all its heroic beauty by Groen van Prinsterer of late, lamented memory?²⁰

How could it be otherwise? Man in his antithesis as fallen *sinner* or self-developing *natural creature* returns again as the "subject that thinks" or "the object that prompts thought" in every department, in every discipline, and with every investigator. Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and 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!"

That cry we have heard, and this work, far too great for our own strength, we have taken up only in reply to this call. We have heard

20. Robert J. Fruin (1823-99) was the nineteenth-century Netherlands' leading historian and a devotee of the liberalism behind the 1848 Constitution. He differed sharply and in print with Kuyper's hero Groen van Prinsterer on this point. Willem Jan Frans Nuyens (1823-94), the country's foremost Catholic historian, refuted the work of John R. Motley but favored the 1848 Constitution for its religious liberalization.

Kuyper met criticism from his own followers with humor. Upon being criticized for serving wine at the banquet attending the Free University's inaugural, he replied:

"*Uilenspiegel*, rarely proper, says of banqueting that the Reformed are not the sort to water down their wine. That's true. From the chocolate kettle and the milk and water bottle rises no race of bold Calvinists."

quoted in J. de Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper: leven en werk in beeld* (Amsterdam: Passage, 1987).

the wails of tragic powerlessness from brethren whose knowledge did not fit their principle, leaving them defenseless despite all their learning because their principle could not contend with a power commensurate with its honor. We have listened to the sighs of our Christian people who, in the shame of their self-abasement, again learned to pray for leaders to command them, for shepherds to tend them, for prophets to inspire them. We realized that the honor of Christ *may* not remain thus trodden under scoffers' feet. As surely as we loved Him with our souls, we *must* build again in his name. And when it seemed of no avail, when we looked upon our meager power, the strength of the opposition, the preposterousness of so bold an undertaking, the fire still kept burning in our bones. There was One mightier than we who urged us and spurred us onward. We could not rest. In spite of ourselves we *had* to go forward. That some of our own brothers advised against building at this time and preferred to go on living with Humanism was a painful source of quiet shame. But it only made the inner drive more urgent, since the hesitation of such men seemed an increasing threat to the future of our life-principle.

And so our little School comes upon the scene, blushing with embarrassment at the name *university*, poor in money, most frugally endowed with scholarly might, more lacking than receiving human favor. What will be its course? How long will it live? Oh, the thousand questions that arise in connection with its future cannot crowd your doubting minds more than they have raged in *this* heart! Only by ever focusing on our sacred principle each time the waves crashed over us did our weary head raise itself bravely from the water. If this cause be not of the Mighty One of Jacob, how could it stand? For I do not exaggerate: it is contrary to all

that is called great, contrary to a world of scholars, contrary to a whole century, a century of enormous charm, that we institute this School.

So look down as freely as your conscience permits upon our persons, our power, and our intellectual significance. The Calvinistic credo, "To esteem God as *everything* and man as *nothing*," gives you the full right to do so. I would ask only one thing of you: even if you are our fiercest opponent, do not withhold your respect for the *enthusiasm* that inspires us. For was not the confession that we have dusted off once the heart-cry of a downtrodden nation? Has not the Scripture before whose authority we bow comforted the sorrowing in your *own* generation as an infallible testimony of God? Was not the Christ whose name we honor in this institution the Inspirer, the Chosen One, the Adored One of your *own* fathers? Suppose that as already written in the carrel and echoed in the blast furnaces, suppose that in accord with your own credo it's all over with Scripture, and Christianity is a vanquished position. Even then I would ask: is not that Christianity even in your eyes too imposing, too majestic, too sacred a historical phenomenon to collapse and die without honor? Has *noblesse oblige* disappeared? Could we permit a banner that we carried off from Golgotha to fall into enemy hands so long as the most extreme measures had not been tried, so long as one arrow was left unspent, so long as there remained in this inheritance one bodyguard — no matter how small — of those who were crowned by Golgotha?

To that question — and with this I conclude, ladies and gentlemen — to that question a "By God, Never!" has resounded in our soul. Out of that "Never!" this institution has been born. And upon that "Never!," as an oath of allegiance to a higher principle, I ask for an echo — may it be an Amen — from every patriot heart!

Selected Bibliography

General Background

A great deal has been written about Kuyper, during his lifetime and since. The titles below represent but a beginning on this literature, yet a good place to start. The lists at the end are meant to help readers who wish to follow up on a particular selection in the anthology, but they have some general interest as well since their titles overlap little with those in the following paragraphs. I have cited English works whenever possible in keeping with the purposes of the anthology, but readers should be aware that there are shelves of Dutch-language monographs, articles, and collections on all aspects of Kuyper — his thought, his projects, his times, his legacy. The only thing lacking, strangely, is a recent comprehensive biography.

The classic life was written by a Roman Catholic: P. Kasteel, *Abraham Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1938). Worthwhile but older studies from within his own movement are W. J. Aalders, *Dr. A. Kuyper* (Haarlem: F. Bohn, 1921), and H. Colijn (ghostwritten by F. C. Gerretson), *Levensbericht van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1923). The most insightful single essay came from a left historian, Jan Romein, "Abraham Kuyper, 1837-1920: De klokkenist der kleine luyden," in Jan and Annie Romein, *Erflaters van onze beschaving* (Amsterdam: Querido's, 1971), pp. 747-70. Insightful though somewhat contradictory recent profiles are George Puchinger, *Abraham Kuyper: De jonge Kuyper (1837-1867)* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1987), and Johannes Stellingwerff, *Dr. Abraham Kuyper en de Vrije Universiteit* (Kampen: Kok, 1987). Jan de Bruijn, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: Leven en werk in beeld* (Amsterdam: Passage, 1987), is an engaging photo essay. The only full biography in English, Frank Vandenberg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), is uncritical; Louis Praamsma, *Let Christ Be*