

The Five World Views

**Of
Abraham Kuyper's
Calvinism**

By Ron Smith

**Ron Smith's Summary of
Abraham Kuyper's Speech at Princeton in 1898.**

"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!'"

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

Abraham Kuyper was an extraordinary figure uniquely capable of wearing several hats throughout his long public career as pastor, theologian, scholar, journalist, educator and statesman. Although he began in the parish ministry, he moved on to become editor of two periodicals; to found the Antirevolutionary Party, the first Dutch political party and the first Christian Democratic party in the world; and to establish the Free University, a Christian university established on Reformed principles. He was first elected to the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament in 1874 and eventually served as Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905. Kuyper's thought was introduced to North America in 1898, when he delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary.

Although Kuyper was not an academic political theorist, he nevertheless laid the foundations for a highly original approach to politics that would come to be labelled "Kuyperian." Its originality consisted in the fact that he sought to articulate a consistently Christian view of the place of politics in God's world free from the distortions of various nonchristian ideologies.

The most characteristic feature of Kuyper's political thought is the principle of *soevereiniteit in eigen kring*, usually referred to in English as "sovereignty in its own sphere," "sovereignty in its proper orbit," or simply "sphere sovereignty." Sphere sovereignty implies three things: (1) ultimate sovereignty belongs to God alone; (2) all earthly sovereignties are subordinate to and derivative from God's sovereignty; and (3) there is no mediating earthly sovereignty from which others are derivative. Current efforts at rehabilitating what is often called "civil society" owe something to this principle.

Kuyper's ideas were further developed by Herman Dooyeweerd and others in the twentieth century.

Kuyper points out that the vital turn in modern history was made in 1789. That year gave birth to the French Revolution and the "violent rise of modern humanism." That struggle continues to rage today. The only answer is Biblical Calvinism.

Kuyper points out that the term Calvinism is used in four ways:

1. In its sectarian use it is used as a derisive term with little or no understanding of what it really is.
2. The dogmatic use represents Calvinists as narrow and dogmatic people who believe in predestination.
3. The denominational use is applied to groups such as "Calvinist Baptists" or "Calvinist Methodists."
4. The scientific use refers to its political name. We say, "political name," because, historically, it sanctions no church hierarchy or magisterial interference by the civil authority, and it results in republican (representative) government.

We can see that it is this very Calvinism, in the scientific use that resulted in the US. Constitution. The French Revolution was based on atheism, while the American one was called "the Scots Irish Presbyterian revolt," and was based on Biblical Calvinism. George Washington and the founding fathers rejected the radicalism of the French Revolution. Calvinism's peculiar theology, special church-order, and its given form for political and social life is unique in its character. The French Revolution was a humanist imitation and counterfeit of Calvinism.

Just as Paganism, Islamism, Romanism and Modern Humanism each have their life systems, so every life-system requires conditions in the three fundamental relations of all human life, namely:

- our relation to God;
- our relation to man, and
- our relation to the world.

The First Condition: Our Relation to God

Paganism worships God in the creature. Islamism isolates God from nature. Romanism teaches "God enters into fellowship with the creature by means of a mystic middle-link, which is the Church." Each of these views stands in opposition to Calvinism.

Calvinism "does not seek God in the creature, as Paganism; it does not isolate God from the creature, as Islamism; it posits no mediate communion between God and the creature, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters into immediate fellowship with the creature, as God the Holy Spirit."

Kuyper anticipates the objection that Luther and Protestantism should share with Calvinism and be given credit for this world-view. Though Luther alone stands by the side of Calvinism, "Luther still leaned upon the Romish view of the sacraments, and upon the Romish *cultus*, while Calvin was the first in both to draw the line which extended immediately from God to man and from man to God." He says, "Even the name of 'Lutheranism' is hardly ever mentioned; while the students of history with increasing unanimity recognize Calvinism as the creator of a world of human life entirely its own."

Some might object that Humanism ("People for the French Way") denies any relation with God. The fact is, they make themselves their own god. Man becomes god.

Kuyper repeats: "Thus I maintain that it is the interpretation of our relation to God which dominates every general life system."

The Second Condition for Every Life-System: Our Relation to our Neighbor

Paganism results in systems of caste, as in India. Islamism results in a system of slavery. The woman is the slave of man and the infidel is the slave of the Moslem. Romanism results in every relation of man to man hierarchically, and leads to "an entirely aristocratic interpretation of life." "Humanism, which denies every difference, cannot rest until it has made woman man and

man woman, and, putting every distinction on a common level, kills life [abortion, etc.?] by placing it under the ban of uniformity. One type must answer for all, one uniform, one position and one and the same development of life; and whatever goes beyond and above it, is looked upon as an insult to the common consciousness [the dogmatic attitude of evolutionists?]."

Calvinism, on the other hand, holds that "we stand as equals before God." "Hence we cannot recognize any distinction among men, save such as has been imposed by God Himself, in that He gave one authority over the other, or enriched one with more talents than the other, in order that the man of more talents should serve the man with less, and in him serve his God. In the same way, Calvinism condemns not merely all open slavery and systems of caste, but also all covert slavery of woman and of the poor; it is opposed to all hierarchy among men; it tolerates no aristocracy save such as is able, either in person or in family, by the grace of God, to exhibit superiority of character or talent, and to show that it does not claim this superiority for self-aggrandizement or ambitious pride, but for the sake of spending it in the service of God... It was Calvinism, then, which was bound to find its unique utterance in the democratic interpretation of life..."

"The difference between [Calvinism] and the wild dream of equality in the French Revolution is that while in Paris it was one action in concert against God, here [in Calvinism] all, rich and poor, were on their knees before God, consumed with a common zeal for the glory of His Name."

Our Relation to the World: The third Requirement for Every Life-System

Paganism and Islamism

"Of Paganism it can be said in general, that it places too high an estimate upon the world, and therefore to some extent it both stands in fear of, and loses itself in it. On the other hand Islamism places too low an estimate upon the world, makes sport of it and

triumphs over it in reaching after the visionary world of a sensual paradise." Muslims make the world a slave and Hinduism is enslaved by it.

Romanism

By the late medieval Church's "dominion over the world the Church proved an obstacle to every free development of its life." This was a dualistic world-view. It was Calvinism that changed England's attitude toward banking and toward the Jews. This brought about prosperity and freedom to invent and create.

Calvinism's Early Rejection of Dualism –

Calvinism rejected dualism with the doctrines of "particular grace, which works salvation, and common grace, by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests on it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator."

"Henceforth, as the Calvinist saw it, the curse should no longer rest upon the world itself, but upon that *which is sinful in it*, and instead of monastic flight from the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life."

Calvinism also rejected the dualism of the Anabaptists who withdrew from all civil institutions and was bound to take all civil life under its guardianship, and to remodel it, by force, if necessary. Scripture gives a good model in Joseph and Daniel "Your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies" (Gen 22:17). True Biblical Calvinism also rejects the dualistic notion of "escapism" from the troubles of the world.

Conclusion to the "Three Fundamental Relations"

"This justifies us fully in our statement that Calvinism duly answers the three above-named conditions, thus is incontestably entitled to take its stand by the side of Paganism, Islamism,

Romanism and Modern Humanism, and to claim for itself the glory of possessing a well-defined principle and an all-embracing life-system."

The first written constitution in history came about as the result of a sermon by Calvinist Thomas Hooker in 1639 Connecticut.

- Everyone has a worldview. Few have a coherent worldview or are able to articulate it clearly.
- Most people don't consider their worldview to be a central defining element of their life, although it is.
- People spend surprisingly little time intentionally considering and developing their worldview. More often than not, their worldview development process is one of unconscious evolution and acceptance. They allow it to evolve and sum it up this way: "Whatever."
- Americans rarely interact with each other on a substantive level regarding matters and issues that relate to worldview development and clarification. When they do so, they often do not know how to process the interaction or how to progress from their existing position.

"Survey after survey has shown that Americans – including a huge majority of born-again Christians and evangelical Christians – lack a biblical worldview."

--- From the book, "Think Like Jesus," by George Barna.

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