

Aart Deddens, editor; Jan H. Boer, trans.; Special Abraham Kuyper, *Sophie*, bimonthly of *Stichting Christelijke Filosofie*, February 2021.

Aart Deddens, Editorial: “The sovereign sector of grace (s.s.o.g.)?”¹

Let us celebrate life together! I regularly receive this invitation from “unbelieving” but thankful friends. Their expression makes me arbitrarily think of Kuyper’s “common grace.” God makes the sun shine on both believers and unbelievers. Through the Creation Mediator (Jesus) the sunlight is gracefully transposed into green leaves. With the released oxygen He simultaneously fills the lungs of both brave and fearful chests. That’s how He gives life. In addition, common grace prevents people from bashing each other’s brains. The human race is a caged tiger. Kuyper also identified “particular grace,” which could also be called “the sovereignty sector of grace” (s.s.o.g.).

Kuyper needed “common grace” as a bridge to the world, to which he was in principle hostile or antithetical. He adhered to the antithesis not only as a major principle in his thoughts, but probably also as a feature of his character. His biographer Jeroen Koch wrote, “Wherever you have Kuyper, you have quarrel and fray.” I can well imagine that. Over a century ago, Kuyper established the first opposition party—or was it even the first of all political parties? It was the Anti-Revolutionary Party versus the French Revolution. Kuyper was not opposed to “Liberty, Equality And Fraternity,” the revolutionary slogan, but against its motif. He dubbed the French Revolution “the second fall into sin.” It was rebellion against God just like the first fall in Paradise. That rebellion called up its opposite: enmity. At a later stage of his life, Kuyper began to think more in terms of the Kingdom perspective, the motif of *Pro Rege* (for the King). After all, to be in favour of something is more constructive than always to oppose.

However, the antithesis had already entered the blood of his Reformed followers. The first philosophers at the Free University but more popularly known as “VU”—*Vrije Universiteit*--, namely Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, developed a “pure”² Christian philosophy. They not only thought antithetically but even anti-

¹ The original title is “Alleen genade in eigen kring (g.i.e.k.)?” This is a play on the Kuyperian term of “*souvereiniteit in eigen kring*,” which has popularly been translated into “sphere sovereignty.” I hope to find a better translation of the title. Anyone?

² Apostrophes from translator.

synthetically, i.e., they opposed every type or degree of mixture of Christian with secular philosophy. They not only considered this rejectable but also impossible. Thus they interpreted the voice of Tertullius, a church father from the second century who asked the rhetorical question, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" In other words: nothing! Christian philosophy is not *salonfähig*. Communication is confrontation. And with this the antithetical followers of Kuyper rejected the concept of "common grace." What is the value of sunlight if you eternally fail to run amiss of "particular grace?"³

Next to the hard-core adherents of the tradition there stand the soft-liner advocates. Augustine, for one, freely rooted around in the basket of Greek philosophy. His reasoning went along the line of what is good, is good. Just as the Jewish priests carried on with their sacrificial rituals in the tabernacle, using the silver cutlery they took with them from Egypt, so, according to Augustine, can Christian thinkers make use of the tools of the great ancient philosophers. While Kuyper's antithesis has its legitimate place, I am happy with what I find in Augustine's drawer. What do Jerusalem and Athens have in common? Methinks friendship. Friends know how to deal with differences without reaching agreement. Aristotle provides the basis for democracy; Jerusalem is the city of peace. Pilgrims used to sing a song that went something like this: "For the sake of brothers and friends among you, I want to seek what is good for you."

I read old books; Johan Snel reads old newspapers. This helps build a less hostile image of Kuyper. Enjoy the read.

³ That was exactly the attitude of their student adherents in the 1950s and 1960s at both Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary, both in Grand Rapids MI. This was due to a one-sided presentation by Prof. Evan Runner at the university. It took this translator several decades to overcome this lopsided approach. In spite of this critique, I am ever so grateful for what I learned from him. This website would not exist without him.