

## Oxygen for the Soul

Aart Deddens

During a certain period in my youth I read everything written by the theologian Klaas Schilder, a Dutch theologian who led a schism from Kuyper's Gereformeerde Church. On vacations I even took along his sermons that my friend and I preached enthusiastically to each other on Sundays. One of his sermons began thus: "There are those who claim that prayer is the oxygen for the soul." For Schilder, who was used to calling a spade a spade, this was a strange and evasive beginning. The mystics, whoever they were, who claimed that prayer is the valve of the soul would get to hear every side. After the vacation I spoke with a retired preacher who had heard this sermon live. He told me it was preached during an afternoon service.... The story demonstrates the difficulty great leaders have tolerating the mediocrity of their colleagues when the former are in the latter's audience. Schilder solved this problem by turning the pulpit into a fighting arena in which he would take his revenge.

Kuyper, instead, stayed home when the bells were summoning the people to the church he himself had established. Most likely his conscience pricked him for not attending his own church, but for a leader it is an enormous sacrifice to be led, as his daughter once wrote. Thus, as I imagine it, he protected himself by playing truant, but he would instead contribute to the Kingdom by writing meditations.

Those meditations were linguistic pearls, not to say, oxygen to the soul. Some are very systematic as, for example, the one about the love commandment with all your mind. *"It does not say that our mind must also serve God; that we must focus all our thinking on God; that we must come to a clear confession of God with our mind, however we think about focusing our mind on God. No, it clearly and distinctly says that we must also **love** God with our mind. Love from our soul is not only to govern our heart but also our mind and see to it that all our strength be guided by that one great motive: love for God. By mind here we do not only refer to our deep thought, our clear judgement, our scholarly understanding. No, mind here is to be understood as the glorious gift of our consciousness, including our impressions, our imagination, our senses and contemplations."*