

Sphere Sovereignty

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In his article “Muslim stories and our story” (p. 4, *CC*, July 24, 2006), Harry der Nederlanden wrote:

For several generations Christians were locked in a life-and-death struggle with historical forces that seemed to be inexorably destroying the faith. Groen van Prinsterer saw all the ills as flowing from a view of history spawned by the French Revolution. That was, perhaps, an overly intellectualistic interpretation of the process, but this gave rise to the Anti-Revolutionary Party in The Netherlands under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. It sought to organize Christians to oppose this wave of change that seemed to be carrying the West toward apostasy and destruction.

Following these words Harry went on explaining why he wrote these words, namely to have us understand that Muslims sense that they are facing now a similar revolution that has the potential to undermine the Muslim faith.

At the time I read Harry’s article I was preparing an article on sphere sovereignty, a phrase coined by Groen van Prinsterer (hereafter Groen) and then further developed by Kuyper. Sphere sovereignty is a principle then used to encounter the struggle Holland was facing, especially in the nineteenth century. I wish to elaborate on that situation in which Groen (1801-1876) and Kuyper (1837-1920) took on that intimidating and powerful wave of change that needed to be stopped to keep society, church and state reasonably free, orderly and prosperous.

This discussion will help us understand that the changes Canada is experiencing these days are similar to those experienced over hundred years ago in the Netherlands. The reader is asked to discern whether the principle of sphere

sovereignty is still today a valid and workable social theory. That means whether this principle could be used to prevent further deterioration of and/or to advance freedom in those spheres in society that are foundational to the religious, political, economic and social welfare in Canada.

In this discussion on the principle of sphere sovereignty, it soon becomes apparent that Kuyper played a significant role in the development and application of this principle. He was a stout promoter of the principle of sphere sovereignty. Because of his important contribution to the protection and welfare of society by earnestly seeking the implementation of this social theory, we will highlight some of the accomplishments found in his legacy. In this review I make use of an article written by John Vander Stelt entitled, "Christian Action and Sphere Sovereignty."

Even though the term sphere sovereignty was originally coined by Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, it was Abraham Kuyper who developed and promoted this principle as a social (and political) theory. The following summary of Kuyper's legacy is intended to enhance our understanding and expectation concerning the important role this principle of sphere sovereignty still needs to play in our daily Christian witness and practice in today's postmodern Canada. It also will help us realize the depth of Kuyper's influence in late nineteenth-century Holland.

As leader of the Dutch Neo-Calvinistic movement, he wrote over 20,000 newspaper articles and scores of pamphlets and speeches in addition to multi-volume treatises on theology, politics, education, science, and philosophy. He also served for almost fifty years as editor of two of the movement's newspapers, a political daily and religious weekly, was co-founder of and professor at the Calvinistic Free University in Amsterdam, and served as promoter and defender of the Christian labor movement. He was head of the Anti-Revolutionary political party for forty years, was a long-time member of the national legislature, and served as prime minister of the Netherlands for four years. The significance of Kuyper for the Netherlands is adequately described by J.H. De Vries in his foreword to Kuyper's devotional book, *To Be Near Unto God* and also mentioned in Kobes' *Sphere Sovereignty and the University*. In 1907 it was said that "The history of the Netherlands, in Church, in State, in Society, in Press, in School, and

in the sciences of the last forty years, cannot be written without the mentioning of his name on almost every page, or during this period the biography of Dr. Kuyper is to a considerable extent the history of the Netherlands.

In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper revealed himself as a person who was very serious about the task at hand. Listen to what he wrote in *De Standaard* in 1897:

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.

In John Bolt's *Christian and Reformed Today* we are told that six years later Kuyper wrote in a letter to his daughter that he saw his task as a call to fulfill a high and glorious task. His task of serving his Lord was a daily struggle, but he received the inspiration to face it from a crucifixion scene that hung above his bed. This background of Kuyper as a person helps us better understand his ability to be a strong leader who would captivate, motivate, and mobilize many people to join him in the struggle against the powerful influence of the modern socialist/communist movement. This movement, according to Evan H. Runner, was creating a totalitarian state with the intention to control all of society and thereby the various spheres which are normally and properly free of state control.

When a Christian person, remarkable as a church man and statesman, of that caliber used the principle of sphere sovereignty as an important basis for his energetic work in service to his Lord, we should realize the importance of this principle and why he used it. It is important for us to assess whether sphere sovereignty may have any validity in today's postmodern Canada and even in the rest of the world.

Origin of the principle of sphere sovereignty

In this brief overview, we go back in history as far as the fourth century. We learn that many Christian leaders used the ideas and principles of the Greek and Roman world of thought and action. The general world view was that the state was all-

powerful and totalitarian, while life and society, including the church, were regarded as subordinate parts of the state. This kind of world view did not change among Christian leaders until John Calvin (1509-1564) who more clearly saw that God's creational laws formed the basis of the various spheres in society that had received their peculiar nature and authority from God. Thus, the state was not to be seen as all powerful and totalitarian. Dooyeweerd considered Althusius' insights as the "first modern formulation of the principle of internal sphere sovereignty in the societal relationships."

During the eighteenth century the Reformational spirit was waning, almost disappearing, while at the same time the spirit of Rationalism and Enlightenment was increasing. These last two movements saw man as possessing his own, rather than a received, sovereignty. The period following the Enlightenment saw new efforts to give more attention to the idea of sphere sovereignty. First, there was the Lutheran jurist and philosopher Friederich Julius Stahl (1802-1853), followed by Groen. Both spoke of the significance of the principle of sphere sovereignty. However, both men, according to Dengerink, failed to see that "all human activities, including human thinking, must be reformed from within through the Word of God and by the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, it was Kuyper who developed this principle more fully once he was faced with a significant crisis. I will say more on that crisis, as well as on the Enlightenment and its influence later.

The meaning of the principle of sphere sovereignty

The term sphere sovereignty is actually a condensed translation of the Dutch formula "*sovereiniteit in eigen kring*," which is best translated as, "sovereignty within one's own, individual sphere (domain)." The term "sphere" can refer to many identifiable groups of people. Kuyper speaks of spheres like social life, home life, fields of trade, art, nature, science, church, and state/government. Other spheres mentioned by him were: provinces, cities or towns, schools, economy, universities, trade unions, labor, factories, stock-markets, shipping, agriculture, fishing, and hunting. At other times, spheres were identified, such as navigation, thinking and conscience, faith, business, philosophy and more.

It is true that Kuyper has never explained how spheres like church, education and many others actually relate to each other, though he has said that the many different spheres, as it were, slide together and influence each other, thus forming the totality of human life. Groenewold wrote about Kuyper that:

He believed that each sphere of life had its own integrity, and was not dependent on any other power or structure for its right to exist. Each sphere of life exercised a legitimate power and authority and enjoyed certain duties and rights. Each sphere had clearly defined boundaries, and no one sphere had the right to impinge upon another or to interfere in its unique task. Any given sphere knows when the influence of another sphere becomes unacceptable.

In *Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, Kalsbeek tells a story that illustrates a case of interference and conflict of interest. In 1930 the Dutch government forbade housewives to make their own butter from cheap ingredients. In response, many a mother complained, "Am I no longer boss in my own kitchen?"

The term "sovereignty" refers to any authority that possesses rights and duties, as well as the exercise of power to take revenge against any opposition to its will (Israel could be such an example). Sphere sovereignty means that each sphere possesses an inherent authority to protect its own well-being. Kuyper spoke of it as the authority that is to be found only in the majesty of God. This divine authority, he said, has descended from the outside into the many different and separate spheres of human societies. Society is thus made up of the sum of all these spheres.

Just as all these separate spheres have received their sovereignty from the Sovereign God, so the sum of these spheres, called a particular society or community, has received its own particular sovereignty from the same God. Kuyper's conclusion was that God's invisible sovereignty is transmitted and entrusted to all people of a society. In connection with the immediacy of the relationship of God and man, it is interesting to hear from Andrew Kuyvenhoven how Kuyper described this relationship:

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 it 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, all men or women, rich or poor, weak or strong, dull or talented, as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently as man to man.

The positive result of being under divine sovereignty is that man's freedom is assured and secured. It allows him to move around freely and in all freedom within any of the spheres.

Kuyper believed that the principle of sphere sovereignty is rooted in creation itself. He understood that each sphere in society has a constant, norm-giving structure, and that its basis and its reason for existence is found in the divine creation order as it also comes from the heart of Scripture.

He substantiated his conclusion by referring, first of all, to chapter five of the Second book of Samuel with its Hebraic verdict regarding the tribes at the time of David's coronation. Then he pointed to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12, in which Jesus had a brief discourse with some Pharisees and Herodians. Speaking on the subject of paying taxes, Jesus replied to these interrogators, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." As he spoke, Jesus drew their attention to the portrait and inscription on a coin he held in his hand.

In further Biblical support for this principle, we may add another occasion where the subject of paying taxes came up. In Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, we read that the paying of taxes (vs. 6) was defended by Paul in light of the fact that all authorities are God's servants. About those authorities Paul had already said that they were established by God (vs.1).

This Bible passage shows that God's sovereignty is displayed in the ordination of all governing authorities, and it is demonstrated in the countries in which these authorities operate.

Furthermore, chapters 38-41 of Job are clear examples of God's sovereign rule and free will over all creation and creatures. Furthermore, Psalm 47 declares: "How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet" (Psalm 47:2,3; NIV).

Freedom

Kuyper found further support for the legitimacy of the principle of sphere sovereignty in the freedom which citizens enjoy. Sphere sovereignty is a legally-protected principle applied to all separate spheres by which freedom of creative labor is protected; there is a sphere life of peaceful coexistence and exchange of valuable goods with other spheres for the common good of society, allowing the exchange of positive influences among the different spheres.

The principle of sphere sovereignty has much to do with the reformation and renewal of people, as well as, with the transformation of society. The reason for this principle is to protect freedom within the various spheres. Without this principle, such freedom might be lost.

Kuyper saw that this freedom is greatest in those nations which have experienced a strong positive influence of a Reformed nature. He saw personal freedom as a hallmark of what he called "the Christian principle." This principle, he said, is rooted in the living Person, who is Christ. I will expand on this issue of freedom in the next discussion on the particular crisis that threatened to undermine that freedom.

In summary, the principle of sphere sovereignty as a social theory functions in different ways. It contributes to an orderly existence within the many social/work spheres. These spheres need to support each other, while operating with a measure of self-sufficiency in terms of economic welfare. This principle protects the freedom and right of existence inherent within each sphere, and restores the sovereignty of those spheres which suffer from any loss of sovereignty. It also

contributes to the creativity of all spheres to grow and to employ themselves in ways that will enhance both their own economic and social welfare, as well as, that of other spheres. This principle promotes justice within and for all spheres.

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Sphere Sovereignty – Part 2

The new, nineteenth-century crisis and its impact on society

The principle of sphere sovereignty formed the Biblical foundation Kuyper used to wage especially his spiritual, but also his social and political warfare against a deplorable crisis that had made its inroads in Europe, as it did in other nations around the world. In his opinion, Holland was the last country of Europe to face the challenge of this crisis. The crisis, earlier referred to by Harry in his article “Muslim stories and our story,” had come in the form of the very destructive influence of Pantheism in nineteenth-century Europe.

Pantheism was regarded as a powerful force that drove life along the road of Evolution. That road was well-paved by Darwin’s theories of processes which were known for their dismissal of clear and distinctive boundaries between species. This last reality of a blurring of sphere boundaries had started by the influence of the forerunner of Pantheism, namely the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

Let me explain. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Holland was trying to develop itself into a growing commercial and colonial empire. Almost simultaneously, the spirit of the Enlightenment became a growing influence in Dutch life. It brought forth a spirit of tolerance and a growing openness to new ideas. Runner, in his discussion of the French Revolution and rationalism, quoted the following words of Charles Frankel:

The special effort of the Enlightenment was to find a foundation in every field, from the profane sciences to revelation, from music to morals, and

theology to commerce, such that thinking and action could be made independent of speculative metaphysics and supernatural revelation. Religion was treated mainly as an appendage to morals and discussed as though it were a part of physics.

During that century, Rationalism “a la Descartes” had made significant inroads into the Dutch nation, resulting in clear but unfortunate divisions within society. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Netherlands and Europe as a whole had come to feel the impact of the French Revolution with its slogan, “Fraternity, Equality, and Liberty.” Regarding the French revolution Runner remarked:

The idea that the French Revolution was a world revolution fundamentally affecting all humanity dates from the eighteenth century itself. In 1796 Edmund Burke wrote: “It is not France extending a foreign empire over other nations; it is a sect aiming at universal empire, and beginning with the conquest of France.

The seriousness of this world-encompassing revolution was also expressed by Hans Sedlmayer as follows:

In the years and decades before 1789, an inner revolution set in Europe, the range of which the mind could not discern: the events we group together under the name ‘French Revolution’ are themselves only a more visible aspect of this awful catastrophe. Up to the present we have not succeeded in getting a firm hold on the situation this event has created, neither in the spiritual nor in the practical realm.

The influence of the Enlightenment had made Europe receptive to the new crisis formed by Pantheism. It had paved the way for this crisis to have a significantly negative impact on European societies. Pantheism, as it is presently embraced by the New Age Movement, was the doctrine that said that the whole universe is God, and that every part of the universe is a manifestation of God, where all is basically one.

Kuyper regarded Pantheism as a destructive storm that was out to break down the important and meaningful boundaries between the different spheres of life.

He was convinced that Pantheism, as was the case before with Darwin's theories of processes, was a serious attack on these boundaries, which were borderlines God had determined and installed. These boundaries included the boundaries between person and person, such as those that determine marriage, along with its norms and values. They also included spiritual boundaries that distinguish good from evil, sin from holiness, and heresy from profession.

Kuyper believed that significant distinctions between spheres were created by God for the good of society. Darwin's destructive effort to dismantle boundaries and demarcation lines between spheres was seen by him as a desire to get rid of God (*zucht om van God af te komen*). He viewed society of his days as sitting in the waiting room of a mortuary.

That century had witnessed Pantheism committing spiritual adultery, the same Pantheism that later was praised by Hegel as the "favorite system" of the nineteenth century. The influence of Pantheism, like the evolution theories of Darwin, became powerful forces that affected the resilience of Europeans. A great majority of them had become quite willing to enjoy tolerance and openness to new ideas.

Another result of that vast spreading spirit of liberation was the abatement and even the breaking down of important boundaries between the distinctive spheres in society. First Groen, and then Kuyper, understood that a serious issue was at stake, namely, the reality and influence of the sovereign God who had established these boundaries within life for the benefit of the various spheres. Kuyper was intent on maintaining and protecting the sovereignty of God in the diverse spheres of life. Holland, as the last bulwark of freedom on Europe's continent was reaching the point of collapse. He felt that at all costs, this impending collapse should be prevented; the last staunch bulwark of freedom must not be allowed to cave in.

The ethical impact of Pantheism

Kuyper made the essential observation that at the heart of this crisis was a more serious issue. He was convinced that the issue at stake was the position of Christ –

the “One who at one time had sworn to be King, the Bearer of Sovereignty.” Pantheism removed the boundary line between God and the world.

Kuyper realized that unbridled Pantheism and Rationalism would lead to serious consequences of the personal well-being of men and women. He especially had in mind the breaking down of human character, since that affected all the factors of his personality: his decisiveness, determination, conviction, will and resilience. He explained that due to the interaction between human character and self-awareness, the clarity of our thinking would become muddled as a result of the breaking down of his character. Eventually this would also lead to the loss of human freedom.

Meeting the new, nineteenth-century crisis: state and church

Groen and Kuyper had deep personal feelings about the crisis they faced. Groen, the politician, had committed himself to the cause of the Gospel. He believed that the Bible was the basis for justice, morality, authority, and freedom. He saw, in the face of this crisis in Europe, that this freedom came from God. He was also convinced that this freedom needed to be protected by man’s respect for the distinctive spheres in society. Such protection could come, foremost, by accepting the sovereignty belonging to each particular sphere.

Sovereignty stood very high on his agenda when it came to the relationship between state and church. He maintained that state and church were two sovereign spheres of life. Later, Kuyper expanded on Groen’s conclusion by saying that these two important spheres, state as well as church, had come into existence by the grace of God. Therefore, these spheres have the duty to act as servants of God and to honor God in and through their servanthood.

Groen argued, for example, that the state is not called to determine the teachings of the church, as these fall completely under the authority of the church. In his book *Ter Nagedachtenis aan Stahl* (1862) Groen introduced the phrase sphere sovereignty (*Souvereiniteit in eigen kring*) to distinguish the calling of the church from that of the state. Through Groen’s work, Stahl understood that the state was tied to the divine world order. It was a created sphere like all other spheres with

particular, though important, limited responsibilities. This fact provided the needed assurance for the legitimate existence of other spheres. Stahl did not think that it was a good idea to give the responsibility of the production of goods into the hands of the state. Such responsibility belonged to spheres like business and industry. The state should mind its own business and leave people free to choose for themselves what spheres of life they wish to be part of and the kind of work they want to do.

In their efforts to meet the crisis head on, Groen and Kuyper called upon the spheres of church and Christian education, leaving the state out of it. Kuyper's reason for excluding the state in his fight against the destructive power of pantheism was the state's misuse of power. As a matter of fact, one main reason for his use of the principle of sphere sovereignty was to prevent the state's transgression of its own sovereignty. He wanted to tame the government's abuse of power, which was impinging on the rights and sovereignty of other spheres. He realized that the state's deplorable behavior and attitude would lead to the loss of freedom, and eventually to the complete loss of the precious principle of sovereignty within each sphere of society.

The government has often been accused of being the most crushing and sinister opponent of liberty. Kuyper, therefore, resorted to the church and Christian higher education (university) to counter the destructive influence of Pantheism. He realized that this crisis was not only leading to the breakdown of the divinely ordained boundaries, but was also causing spiritual atrophy among the people.

He also noted similar declines in spiritual strength and resilience during the time of the Roman Empire and during the Middle Ages. These particular declines, he noticed, were overcome successfully with the help of the Church of Christ. This time, however, Kuyper wondered whether the church would be able to provide the people with the help needed to restore their fading resilience. The life of the church was at stake, and with it the gospel message of truth and the freedom which flowed out of the truth. A strong counter action was called for.

The church engaged in the fight against the nineteenth-century crisis

A brief overview of church history during the eighteenth and nineteenth century will lead us to Kuyper's days. During the eighteenth century, due to the influence of the Enlightenment, orthodox voices in the churches, as in government, saw their influence dwindle. They eventually became a minority, as they were in all other main areas of life. Within the church, a wall of division developed, with the uneducated and the poor on the one side, and the more educated and the wealthy on the other side. The latter, including many educated pastors, embraced the spirit of modernism, rejected the narrowness of the past, and delivered their homilies in learned discourses. Consequently, the common folk began to lean to a more experiential, mystical, and pietistic form of the Christian faith. They looked for other ways to be edified and built up by the preaching of God's Word.

They found the solution in the formation of small groups, called conventicles. These households of faith met in private homes and were often led by lay leaders. They became the spiritual feeding ground for renewed spiritual growth, mutual support, and encouragement for many people.

This was the situation in the Dutch Reformed Church at the turn of the 19th century. At the time of Groen and in the early years of Kuyper, it was still officially a unified State Church despite divisions in the church. However, a break within the State Church seemed inevitable.

The anticipated break was finally realized in the Secession (*Afscheiding*) of 1834. The Secession, however, was not a one-time event. D.H. Kromminga comments that the Secession really consisted of a series of movements out of the National Church, which took place over a period of about twenty years.

So Kuyper, as a young man, grew up during the Secession years. This break within the church was more serious than initially expected, as the National Synod of the established church took comfort in the fact that the number of seceders was rather small. By 1836, they numbered some four thousand men, women, and children, who mostly came from "the humbler walks of life." But, beyond expectation, this group of believers grew spiritually so strong that it astounded its adversaries. It soon became clear that this spiritual growth and resilience was

based on their common love for Reformed doctrine and their loyalty to the Reformed formularies as founded on the Word of God.

The Secession was not at all an isolated event in the Netherlands. A similar secession had taken place in Switzerland a little earlier, and for similar reasons, namely, to rescue the Reformed tradition from the deadly embrace of a liberal State. For the same reasons, other secessions took place in the Scottish National Reformed or Presbyterian Churches and even among the Lutheran Churches in Germany. There was, therefore, broad European support for the Dutch seceders well described in Kromminga's *The Christian Reformed Tradition*:

From foreign Reformed Churches came proofs of sympathy with the seceders. In Switzerland and in France the reformed observed days of prayer in their behalf. From France came a petition signed by one hundred and seventy-three ministers asking the king to grant the seceders freedom of worship. From France came also a request to the National Synod of the established Church to intercede with the king in behalf of the seceders, evidently in ignorance of the fact that this body had requested their repression. These efforts of foreign co-religionists were not effective, but they were encouraging for the seceders in their long and hard struggle to obtain freedom of worship from the government.

However, it was that struggle for freedom of worship that led eventually to some internal divisions among the seceders. Then, unexpectedly, the ranks of original seceders were suddenly strengthened when in 1886 Kuyper led about 500,000 more people out of the state church in an event known as the Doleantie. This group (Doleantie means "The Grieving Church") joined the seceders of 1834 to form De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in 1892.

In the meantime, the theological School of Kampen was founded in 1854 with the cooperation of men of Reformed persuasion in the established church. This Theological School was established to train pastors who would be firmly grounded in the Word of God. These pastors would help the church to be and remain resilient in spirit and successful in opposing the growing and destructive influence of liberalism.

Though aware of the spiritual weakness of the churches, Kuyper nevertheless called them to the important task to resist the destructive worldly forces. Faced with the question of how to go about this resistance, he explained that they must begin by drawing a boundary line around their own sphere, the church. He based this explanation on Groen, who declared, "In our isolation lies our strength."

However, this isolation was not to be understood as a withdrawal from the world. Rather, it was understood as a return to living by the principles unique to the Christian faith and the Christian world-and-life view. Within this sphere, life had to develop to the point that it could give account for itself and cope with the battle that could not be avoided. In that isolation the church had a chance to strengthen her own vitality and to be of help of other spheres for their betterment. In his book, *Pro Rege of Het Koningschap van Christus*, Kuyper showed clearly his opposition to what he called a "world-flight mentality arising from the viewpoint of the Anabaptists and found in evangelical Christian circles." Kuyper called people to live *Pro Rege*, i.e. under the kingship of Christ, "for the King," in all areas of life.

Higher education and the nineteenth-century crisis

Alongside his work for the church, Kuyper also worked hard to get help and support from the sphere of Christian higher education in his fight against the destructive power of Pantheism. It is of interest to know how the Free University came to be established. We go back to the sixteenth century, when the University of Leiden was the Christian institute in the sphere of higher education. Wayne Kobes reminds us that during the sixteenth century the influence of a "God-denying humanism and a liberal theology" had not left the Dutch universities untouched.

Since its establishment in 1575, the University of Leiden had been "intentionally and explicitly" governed by Calvinistic principles. However, this University had become progressively more liberal.

An important factor in this development had been the appointment of Professor Jacob Arminius to the faculty of theology at Leiden's University despite strong

opposition from many Reformed pastors and congregations. Arminius, dubbed the “voice of Erasmus,” had already caused a serious controversy in the Dutch churches. After his death, a group sympathetic to his views (Arminians) collectively took the initiative to document their beliefs in what was called the Remonstrance of 1610. These teachings included: election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. These public teachings eventually led to the convening of the historically important Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The direct result of this long convention, attended by Dutch delegates and twenty-six delegates from eight foreign countries, was the composition of a Doctrinal Standard called The Canons of Dort. This body of teachings was, in essence, a systematic refutation of the teachings promoted by Arminius’ followers.

However, despite these serious efforts to defend the truth of the Word of God by trying to stop the liberal influence, the fact remained that, in general, Dutch life “followed the voice of Erasmus rather than that of the great Genevan (Calvin).”

Kuyper understood the struggle against powerful liberal forces as a spiritual one, as these forces were trying to undermine and do away with the sovereignty of God. In 1880 he became the main force behind the establishment of the Free University of Amsterdam, which he considered to be a formidable force and an effective instrument in the hands of those who wish to engage effectively in the “critical issues of the nation and of the world.” Kuyper looked at this new University as a means by which the church would be able to staunchly oppose a world of learned men, and to row against the current of enormously attractive temptations. What he envisioned was that Christians in high positions who would see and take the opportunity to develop Christian principles and values in the various spheres of society.

He understood that the church must equip believers, as Charles Colson observes in his book *The Body: Being light in the darkness*, to know and to defend their faith and to apply it in the world. In equipping believers, Kuyper needed the help of the Free University. Kuyper developed a mission strategy based on a missions

vision I call *sphere missions* to put up a good fight against the powerful force of liberalism.

That was over one hundred years ago, but ... are we not facing a similar situation in Canada as well?

In my next article I hope to write soon, I will lay out that vision of sphere missions in greater detail. In that context I will speak of sphere sovereignty as a missiological theory that calls upon believers to revitalize their priesthood to serve the Lord in the many spheres of life he has placed them. In the meantime, I would like to invite readers to respond to a discussion on the principle of sphere sovereignty as that in so many instances can and needs to be promoted and applied throughout the world, and not the least in Canada.

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