

History and Nature of Kuyper Meditations

Translated, Edited and Introduced by Jan H. Boer

Introduction by Translator

Abraham Kuyper is famous more for his amazing prophetic social and political career and for the tomes he wrote in the course of that career than for his meditational life and writings. Yet, he has written thousands of meditations that have been published in numerous books and series, certainly more than any other meditational writer that I know.

The Kuyperian movement has, at its own hurt, listened more to Kuyper's philosophical, theological, social and political writings than to his meditations. In fact, it almost seems as if the latter were consciously suppressed. All appearances of meditational and spiritual nature were at best ignored and, at worst, treated contemptuously as pietism. The movement has been so contemptuous of *pietism* that it often appeared to shy away from genuine *piety*. To some the movement has at times appeared *impious*, especially in the strident way disagreements have been aired. I have been guilty of this tendency myself.

Having said this, I hasten to affirm that a few of its adherents have over the past few decades written some very deeply spiritual meditations that demonstrate none of this negative heritage. I refer especially to Andrew Kuyvenhoven, a former editor of the Christian Reformed weekly *the Banner*; to Louis Tamminga, a former Director of the Christian Reformed Pastor-Church Relations Office; and to Neill Plantinga, former President of Calvin Theological Seminary. I suspect there are others, including women, and regret the sparsity of my listing.

Had the movement's adherents in general paid more attention to Kuyper's meditational side, their internal disagreements and their external attacks might have been expressed more gently not only, but even the many schisms in Kuyperian denominations might not have occurred. The movement has been marked more by triumphalism than by piety and more by dogmatic correctness than by grace.

However, I want to make it clear that, in spite of these shortcomings, the contemporary Kuyperian movement has positively, deeply and richly influenced the international Christian community in myriads of ways that I cannot describe

adequately in this context. No movement is ever perfect. I have described some of that on the Kuyperiana page of my website (see footnote 1 below) as well as in my wife and my joint memoirs, *Every Square Inch: A Missionary Memoir*, available on the “Boeriana” page of the same website. ***Our proper response to these shortcomings is not to reject the movement by joining either so-called “Evangelical” or “liberal” churches or, God forbid, descend into the meaning-challenged secular culture. Rather, it is to help cleanse it from within by shedding the remaining residues of that past triumphalism and clumsy piety and replace all that with a genuine, open and fresh spirituality without losing the unique comprehensive thrust of this tradition.***

It is for that reason that I have translated and published Kuyper’s meditations on the ascension of Christ into Heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit in ebook format under the title ***The Ascent of the Son—The Descent of the Spirit: 26 Meditations on Ascension and Pentecost.***¹ The two meditations below are herewith offered to you in translation as further contribution to this spiritual cleansing and revival of the movement.

This document contains two meditations written by Kuyper. He wrote thousands of them. Those in this document are numbers 2000 and 2001 written in the newspaper the *Heraut*, (*The Herald*). These two meditations are unique in their subjects. While the first is a history of how this long series came about, the second is, as Kuyper himself put it, a meditation about meditating! And while the first has an overtly historical title, the second title is drawn from Scripture itself. You can here discover the deep spirituality that marked Kuyper’s life. His was not divided life between the spiritual and the social; the one flows into the other, cleanses it and renders it meaningful, sacred and even joyful.

Tweeduizendste Meditatie²

Meditation No. 2000

Abraham Kuyper

¹ Accessible / available on < www.ccel.org >, < www.lulu.com > and on the Translator’s website < www.SocialTheology.com/kuyperiana.htm >, all free of charge.

² Jan H. Boer, transl/editor. *De Heraut*, May 17, 1916. English translation in 2015.

Already in 1869, while founder of the present *Heraut* and still a pastor in Utrecht, I began working in the field of journalism, getting involved in both politics and religion. Dr. Schwarz, who turned the *Heraut* of that time into a politico-religious entity, moved permanently to England in 1869 and invited me to succeed him. From that time till April 1, 1872, I continued largely in the traditional role of the paper, but then in 1870 changed it into a completely independent entity.

In 1872, incessant calls arose from all over, indicating dissatisfaction with the paper's continued status as a weekly. Thus, on the third centennial of the capture of the city of Briel,³ the *Heraut* was turned into a daily under the name of "*Standaard*." From here on this now political daily would publish a weekly Sunday edition as well which already then occasionally included a few meditations.

When I contracted a disease during 1875/1876 that lasted two years, we interrupted the publication of that double weekend edition. During that time only the politically oriented *Standaard* was available, while the weekly spiritual version disappeared. People were not happy with this development. Hence, when, partially restored to health, I returned from Nice during the summer of 1877, I immediately decided to publish a wholly new independent religious weekly. It made its debut on December 7, 1877.

From the very first issue of this entirely new weekly, that was to be exclusively oriented towards church and theology, the column "The Meditation" became a regular feature without interruption from issue to issue. The first meditation, based on Psalm 132:2, had as its subject "The Weaned Child;" the second, "The Foxes that Have Holes" (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). And so this series has run from December 7, 1877 till today, May 21, 1916, without interruption through two thousand successive issues of the *Heraut*.

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With the exception of four, I myself have written every one of these meditations, always on the Lord's Day. It was only on these four Sundays in August, 1894, when I contracted a serious case of pneumonia in Brussels, that through all these

³ Translator's note: In 1572, during the 80-year Dutch war of independence from Spain, a band of rough neck Protestant marine warriors, called "*Watergeuzen*," captured the small city of Den Briel from the hands of Alva, their Spanish overlord. This event marked a significant turning point in the war in favour of the Dutch. I suspect that Kuyper's reference to this event was to put his struggle against Dutch liberal Protestants on the same level as that earlier Dutch struggle against the Spanish Roman Catholic regime.

thirty-nine years I was prevented from writing. My oldest son, Dr. H. H. Kuyper, kindly stood in for me during that brief period. I have every reason as a writer to ardently praise my God and to testify that in all these thirty-nine years I have never been prevented from carrying out this satisfying labour. I never deviated from my firm habit to write a Meditation each Sunday, even when I might be resting in a mountain cabin during a climbing expedition or find myself on an ocean liner somewhere on the high seas. I have not allowed anyone, no matter who, to interrupt me from carrying on with this fixed habit. That was the only way this collection of *Two Thousand Meditations*, completely separate from those earlier ones in that Sunday paper, could see the light of day.

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As is well known, the entire series of these *Meditations* have appeared as special editions, even in second and third prints. They saw the light in the following sequence:

Honing uit den rotssteen, 2 volumes,	1880
Second print	1896
Gomer voor de Sabbath	1889
Second print	1904
Voor een distel een mirt	1891
Inexpensive edition	1894
Second print	1896
Third print	1914
Inexpensive edition; fourth print	1914
In de schaduw des doods	1893
Second print	1908
Als gij in uw huis zit	1899
Second print	1900
Zijn uitgang te Jeruzalem	1901
Second print	1905
Third print	1912
In Jezus ontslapen	1902
Second print	1906
Third print	1912
Nabij God te zijn	1908
Second print	1912

Thus it may be said without exaggeration that these Two Thousand Meditations mirror a/an (important) part of my life. These Meditations constantly and naturally reflect whatever occupied, touched or moved me at the time of writing.⁴

Should I be allotted a few more years, I hope to persevere in this life's task till the end. However, already now I should not delay expressing a quiet gratitude to the Lord my God for the uninterrupted strength given me for so many years to doggedly pursue this spiritual labour. It is my prayer that henceforth no blessing will be withheld from this task.

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To my inner joy, I could tell from the many letters I received last week that those blessings are not lacking. I had a discussion recently with Mr. and Mrs. Brummelkamp—Esser about the publication of the two thousandth Meditation. They were kind enough to place a notice that did not appear in the copies reserved for me, about what was about to take place. They also intimated to my readers that they would fill me with joy if they would indicate to me the spiritual fruit that has come out of these two thousand meditations. This friendly invitation resulted in a trove of letters that has deeply touched me personally.

It goes without saying that these letters are of such a personal and intimate nature that I would not even consider placing them in the *Heraut*. They belong more properly in the terrain of private emotion. However, they comprise a treasure of psychological insights into our current circumstances. Hence, I will deposit them in my archives. In all probability, if I ever get around to writing my memoirs, those letters will constitute a meaningful contribution to that project.

At this point I must naturally express my warm gratitude to the Brummelkamps for eliciting these personal soulful utterances of my readers. They are worth gold to me and encourage me to proceed with my consecrated Sunday labour.

--Abraham Kuyper, May 17, 1916

⁴ Translator's note: This acknowledgement by Kuyper confirms my affirmation of the same point in my Introduction to my translation of Kuyper's *Op den Pinksterdag* under the title *The Ascent of the Son—The Descent of the Spirit: 26 Meditations on Ascension and Pentecost*, p. 5. See www.ccel.org and/or www.SocialTheology.com and/or www.lulu.com. Emphasis inserted by translator.

Meditation No. 2001

It Is Good to Be Near God

(Meditation about Meditating)

But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.
(Psalm 73:28)

Please allow me this time a Meditation about meditating.

A Meditation is something completely different from an academic lecture or debate and varies greatly as well from a Bible exposition. When you intend to meditate, you retreat from your normal train of thought. You don't entirely withdraw from the world, but neither do you engage yourself mindlessly with the affairs that normally occupy you. You don't exactly extricate yourself from the world, but it becomes a secondary issue for you, while the crux for you is and remains concentrating on your experience of communion with God. While meditating, the soul is deaf to the world in order to exclusively listen to what God wants to say to your soul.

In our actual daily life of faith during which we carry out our calling, we are *active*, while during our meditations we are exclusively *passive*. While we are meditating, we are intentionally silent in order to open our heart to hear God speaking to our soul. The Psalms especially reveal what actually takes place during this mystical experience in the soul.

The ancient hymn *Te Deum*⁵ is also temptingly beautiful as is that moving hymn, "Central point of our desires, Comforter of our troubled heart." Such hymns speak deeply to us, but yet they cannot usher us into that mystical experience. We create them as *active* people to break out into praise and bow down in adoration.

This is not to say that the notes from a poet's heart have never flowed so as to usher us into the silence of meditation, but in this respect our Psalms are unique

⁵*Te Deum* is an [early Christian hymn](#) of praise. The title is taken from its opening [Latin](#) words, *Te Deum laudamus*, rendered as "Thee, O God, we praise".

and unsurpassed. In many Psalms we can keenly feel how the psalmist lost himself completely in communion with his God and absorbed emotions from on high in his experiences.

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Pious people still understand deeply how to appreciate the wholly profound depth of such expressions in the Psalms. The soul immerses itself in the ecstasy of worship as God's house echoes with the song,

Souls in which His fear is live,
Find God's hidden fellowship.
Salvation's depth to his friends is shown
According to His cov'nant of peace.

Or when this song from Psalm 89 wells up from every heart with deep voices:

How blessed are the people that listen to Your voice;
They walk, Lord, in the light of Your godly face.
All through the day they rejoice in Your Name

Practically all of Psalm 139 exudes the same glory.

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
⁵You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

At its triumphal end, each meditation always ends up with the blessed confession of Psalm 73:28, “ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all Your deeds.”

In our human spiritual world, we cannot imagine a more intimate and tender way than how these Psalms express the sweetness of spiritual communion with our Triune God. At that point we once again enter into communion with the Holy, from which at first the soul recoils, but by which it eventually is irresistibly pulled along. It constitutes as it were an erasure of oneself in order for God to be all in all and to experience that state in the consciousness of our own souls. Of course, our awareness is extremely vague, based more on guessing than on sure knowledge. Nevertheless, it leads to an awareness of a blessedness that surrounds us and makes us forget ourselves in order to drink in only what flows towards us from on High.

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It must not be denied that even in meditation there lurks a danger. For this reason, genuine mystics throughout history have uttered serious warnings never to allow self-promotion to creep in. After all, one finally reaches a wholly marvelous and blessed moment in meditating where tiredness sets in and as if our sins just slide off us, as if we have forgotten the limitation of our knowledge and as if the enjoyment of heaven were already ours.

That is allowed and can even benefit us, not only to refresh the soul but also to sanctify it, as long as it is a momentary submersion in the stream of the eternal to emerge in a little while from this stream and return to the concrete existence of our normal life.⁶ Where this happens, our self-erasure is strengthened, our submersion revives us and we return to our life’s (normal) calling with renewed strength. In such a case, there is no talk of self-promotion over others because of what we have enjoyed. Rather, never, during the depth of this spiritual submersion has the soul felt its own negation and lack of wisdom rebound more over against the holy light of her God.

⁶Kuyper’s words here are “*reeele leven*.” That is to say literally “real life.” This can give the impression that the spiritual experiences he describes are not real. This would not be in keeping with the thrust of this meditation. Hence I have taken the liberty of translating the term as “normal life,” recognizing that even that is a loaded term.

The above is the reason that we never once lost our way in even a single meditation in this series. We made sure to keep Scripture, the Word, at the forefront, while the Meditation would then follow. We have constantly been on our guard not to place the Meditation outside of reality* by way of self-defeating dreams.

One cannot meditate on behalf of others. We can meditate in an intensive and saintly manner only for ourselves when the Image of God in its depth tenderly draws us to Him who reflects that Image.

Thus we strove constantly to descend from the height of meditations back down into full life. After all, the purpose and fruit of meditating is to enrich the fulfillment of our daily work so as to render our lives glorious and meaningful.