

Abraham Kuyper: Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Politician and Political Thinker

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The figure of Abraham Kuyper looms large over the political and social landscape of nineteenth and twentieth century Holland. He held significant posts in government, education, and the church. His social theory impacted Dutch society for much of the twentieth century. His influence on both continental and American Christian political thought is substantial. And yet, Kuyper's legacy is largely understated, and his political thought unknown in many corners of the scholarly world, including Australia. This article seeks to address this by surveying some of the major aspects of Kuyper's political thought while placing him in his historical setting. By doing so, I will show that Abraham Kuyper is a transitory figure in political history, occupying an important place in the development of the relationship between religion and the modern state.

In 1962, Bishop John Cullinane authorised the closure of six Roman Catholic schools in Goulburn, Australian Capital Territory.¹ Unable to fund the government-mandated upgrades to toilet facilities in the schools, and with the state government unwilling to provide funding, the schools closed and sent all of their children to the local state schools.² The ruling Labor Party government was officially opposed to state aid for non-government schools, and this dramatic move by the Catholic hierarchy caused both sides of Australian politics to reconsider how government should interact with faith-based organisations.³ At the centre of this contention was the relationship between the state and religion. A secular government was unwilling to directly fund faith-based education, consequently finding itself at the centre of "the most poisonous debate".⁴

The problem the government was facing in 1962 was religious pluralism. Not everyone in Australian society shared the same beliefs. This situation continues today, and the question of the relationship between the state and religious institutions is still unresolved. One attempt at resolving this long-standing quagmire was made by Dutch Calvinist theologian and politician, Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper was an extraordinary figure in many respects. He held significant administrative, political, clerical, and educational posts across his wide-ranging career. His theological and political thought has influenced generations of Calvinists, and he is credited with being a major contributor to the establishment of the unique plural structures of Dutch society.⁵

¹ John Warhurst, "50 years since Australia's 'most poisonous debate'", *Eureka Street*, Vol. 22, 13 (2012).

² Joshua Puls, "The Goulburn Lockout", *Australasian Catholic Record*, Vol. 81, 2 (2004), pp.174-75.

³ Warhurst, "50 years since Australia's 'most poisonous debate'".

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Paul Arblaster, *A History of the Low Countries* (Houndmills, 2006), p.196; James C. Kennedy, "The Problem of Kuyper's Legacy: The Crisis of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in Post-War Holland",

Kuyper's life and times will be examined in some detail, and his political thought will be explicated and placed in its historical setting. Kuyper's most unique and significant contribution to political thought was his theory of sphere sovereignty. The focus of our examination will be how Kuyper responded to religious and ideological pluralism in light of that theory. A historiographical and biographical summary of Abraham Kuyper's life and times will also show that Kuyper occupies a small but significant place in the development of the modern nation state, in particular the development of the relationship between religion and the state.

Abraham Kuyper's Times

Abraham Kuyper's lifetime was one of change and transition. The year of his birth was 1837.⁶ The Netherlands was still reeling from Napoleonic invasion and influence.⁷ The Holland in which Kuyper lived was deeply affected and influenced by the Reformation, an event which transformed much of European civilisation.⁸ William I was proclaimed King of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands after Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, a crowning instigated by the peace congress held in Vienna after the war against France, and the drafting of a new constitution for the kingdom.⁹ William was ruling over a kingdom which was united in name only, with a population split between Catholics in the south and Protestants in the north.¹⁰ Political and personal developments, namely a revised constitution and his engagement to a Catholic woman, brought William I's reign to a voluntary end and in 1840 he abdicated.¹¹ His son, William II, ascended to the throne.¹²

During the 1840s, liberal-nationalist revolutions were breaking out all over the continent.¹³ In 1848, with tensions rising in the Netherlands, along with the development of what E.H. Kossmann calls "doctrinaire liberalism", William II suddenly decided to have the Dutch constitution thoroughly revised.¹⁴ The lower house of the *Staten Generaal* (the Dutch parliament) was to be elected directly by secret ballot, and the upper house was no longer to be appointed by the monarch, but elected according to province.¹⁵ Members of the parliament could introduce and amend legislation, and changes were afoot to make ministers responsible to the parliament and

Journal of Markets and Morality, Vol. 5, 1 (2002), p.49; E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford, 1978), p.304.

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Peabody, 2008), p.viii.

⁷ George Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper's Historical Understanding and Reformed Historiography", *Fides et Historia*, Vol. 37, 1 (Winter/Spring 2005), p.73.

⁸ Meic Pearse, *The Age of Reason: From the Wars of Religion to the French Revolution, 1570-1789* (Oxford, 2006), pp.17-20; Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Southern Gate, 2010), pp.54, 347f; G.R. Evans, *The Roots of the Reformation: Tradition, Emergence and Rupture* (Downers Grove, 2012), pp.471-72.

⁹ Arblaster, *A History*, p.174; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.112.

¹⁰ Arblaster, *A History*, pp.174-76.

¹¹ Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.180; Gerald Newton, *The Netherlands: an Historical and Cultural Survey 1795-1977* (London, 1978), p.57.

¹² Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.180.

¹³ Arblaster, *A History*, p.181.

¹⁴ Newton, *The Netherlands*, p.64; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, pp.188-92.

¹⁵ Arblaster, *A History*, p.181; For details of the electoral changes, see Newton, *The Netherlands*, pp.65-66.

not the monarch.¹⁶ The Netherlands had begun its age of liberalism, and the *Staten Generaal* had become a modern parliament.¹⁷

Abraham Kuyper's Life

Such was the socio-political climate of Abraham Kuyper's formative years, 1837-1854. Kuyper was born the eldest son of a Dutch Reformed Church minister and an ex-school teacher.¹⁸ Following the completion of his schooling, a seventeen year old Abraham enrolled in Leiden University, which was at that time the centre of the new modernistic theology.¹⁹ He quickly abandoned the Reformed orthodoxy of his youth, embracing the modern theology and higher biblical criticism of the modernistic stream.²⁰ He was a voracious and talented student of theology and history, ultimately concentrating his energies on church history and becoming a highly-regarded specialist in early Dutch Calvinism.²¹ Yet, for all his interest and knowledge of Calvinism, he had low regard for that particular theological school.²² As a result of his time at Leiden, Kuyper carried his modernistic theology into his pastoral ministry in the national church.²³ A more surprising influence on Kuyper's orientation was Charlotte Yonge's novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Kuyper's fiancée gifted the novel to him, and it brought about an intellectual and spiritual crisis.²⁴ Kuyper himself observed that the book "broke my smug, rebellious heart!"²⁵ While this appears to be some form of conversion experience, Kuyper would himself later relate that it was a vital but incomplete turn, writing: "What my soul experienced at that moment I fully understood only later. Yet, from that moment on, I despised what I used to admire and I sought what I had dared despise!"²⁶ Strange as this experience may seem to us, it had a profound impact on the direction of Kuyper's life.

Kuyper began his pastoral career in the village of Beesd, and found himself out of touch with his parishioners.²⁷ They disagreed with the theological baggage he brought from Leiden, and Kuyper was confronted with a traditional Calvinism which he considered more than merely a tradition; it was a way of life and thought.²⁸ His time at Beesd resulted in his conversion to Calvinist Christianity, and he broke away from the modernistic theology of his university days.²⁹ Kuyper moved through a number of

¹⁶ Arblaster, *A History*, p.181.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, 1998), p.27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

²⁰ James E. McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man: The Life and Work of Abraham Kuyper* (Auburn, 2000), pp.16-17; Dirk Jellman, "Abraham Kuyper's Attack on Liberalism", *Review of Politics*, Vol. 19, 4 (1957), pp.472-73; Justus M. van der Kroef, "Abraham Kuyper and the Rise of Neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands", *Church History*, Vol. 17, 4 (1998), p.316; Kent A. Van Til, "Subsidiarity and Sphere Sovereignty: A Match Made In...?", *Theological Studies*, Vol. 69, 3 (2008), p.620.

²¹ Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper's Historical Understanding", pp.75-76.

²² McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, p.17.

²³ Van der Kroef, "Abraham Kuyper and the Rise", p.317.

²⁴ Abraham Kuyper, "Confidentially", in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, 1998), pp.51-52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.54.

²⁷ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.32-33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.34; For one of Kuyper's accounts of this realisation see "Confidentially", in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, pp.55-57.

²⁹ McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, pp.36-37.

other parishes, in Utrecht and then Amsterdam, involving himself in ecclesiastical politics and reform.³⁰ He campaigned for a return to historical Reformed orthodoxy, and the adoption of an independent church polity.³¹ He became the leader of the orthodox faction within the Dutch Reformed Church, and his activism culminated in him leading a break-away from the national church to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.³² In the meantime, Kuyper entered into politics.

March 1874 saw Abraham Kuyper become the second youngest member of the Dutch parliament.³³ Kuyper's path toward political life was forged in his meeting of anti-revolutionary leader Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer in 1869, when the latter took the former under his metaphorical wing.³⁴ Groen³⁵ was an historian and political theorist, who held positions as secretary to the Dutch government during William I's reign, and then archivist of the House of Orange-Nassau.³⁶ Groen's deepest concerns were the increasing liberalism in Dutch politics, and the progressive decline of Christianity in Holland.³⁷ His research into the French Revolution revealed, for him at least, that the growth of liberalism in Holland was a great danger and one that was antithetical to Christianity.³⁸ Groen saw the spiritual meaning of the Revolution as a revolt against God and an overturning of the divine order of things.³⁹ At the root of the Revolution was "unbelief".⁴⁰ The fruit of the French Revolution was "general disorder", Groen wrote, which came about because of "the disrespect for the essential laws of humanity and the systematic overthrow of the social order".⁴¹ Irreligion resulted in revolution, which leads to dictatorship, and finally communism.⁴² Upon realising this, Groen's quest became one of a Christian political response to the results of, and motivations behind, the Revolution. Thus, the anti-revolutionary movement was born. Kuyper joined Groen in his political quest, assuming leadership of the anti-revolutionary group in 1871, and founding the anti-revolutionary newspaper *De Standaard* the following year.⁴³

When Kuyper entered parliament, he arrived as an already powerful public figure and managed to unite the previously disparate anti-revolutionary parliamentarians around a common political stance.⁴⁴ His parliamentary performance was polemical and controversial; in a series of speeches he denounced Liberalism and Conservatism as

³⁰ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, pp.10-11.

³¹ McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, pp.39-40.

³² Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, pp.10-11; McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, pp.39-40.

³³ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.39.

³⁴ McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, pp.40-42.

³⁵ "Groen" is the normal way scholars refer to Groen van Prinsterer, and so this is how he will be referred to here.

³⁶ E.L. Hebden Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State* (Nutley, 1966), p.31; Harry Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief And Revolution* (Jordan Station, 1989), pp.43, 52.

³⁷ A. Thompson, "Christian social and political thought and action in the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th centuries", *Orientation*, No. 75-78 (1995), p.165.

³⁸ Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy*, pp.31-33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.33; Groen Van Prinsterer, "XI: First Phase: Preparation (till 1789)", in Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures*, Nos.260-65.

⁴⁰ Van Prinsterer, "VIII: Unbelief", in Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures*, No. 180.

⁴¹ Quoted in Thompson, "Christian social and political thought", p.165.

⁴² Van Prinsterer, "XV: Conclusion", in Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures*, No. 405; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.186.

⁴³ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.37-38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.39-40.

dead, and demanded universal household suffrage, government regulation of the economy, and an Upper House of parliament which represented occupational groups.⁴⁵ Kuyper began drafting an “Anti-Revolutionary Party” programme in these early years in the parliament, starting the move toward a mass Christian political party.⁴⁶ A breakdown in his health forced Kuyper to retreat from parliamentary politics for a time, but he continued to campaign and organise, leading a move against an 1878 education bill, which became the defining moment in what is known as the “school struggle”.⁴⁷ The bill crippled private confessional schools, and essentially gave state schools sole access to government funding, which some parents saw as undermining their free choice of school.⁴⁸ Kuyper’s enormous organisational and campaigning skills were evident in both the organisation of the party, and the extraordinary petition he was able to have presented to the King in response to the education bill. In a country with 122,000 eligible voters, the Anti-Revolutionaries collected 305,000 signatures.⁴⁹ The campaign galvanised the Calvinist and anti-revolutionary population, with Kuyper leading a move toward the building of a separate Calvinist school system, and in 1879 he was able to lead the formation of the first mass political party in Holland; the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP).⁵⁰ 1880 saw Kuyper founding the *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University), an institution based on confessional Calvinism which was free from state control, which came to alter the landscape of higher education in the Netherlands.⁵¹ He taught theology there from its founding, until 1901.⁵²

In 1884, riding on the back of the school struggle, Kuyper succeeded in marshalling a coalition of Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and Catholic political parties around their shared political and social concerns, and in 1888 the coalition won fifty-two of 100 lower house seats.⁵³ An ARP/Catholic government was formed, and Kuyper’s political program could begin to be implemented. Changes to school funding were slow in taking, and attempts to reform child and women’s labour laws were unsuccessful.⁵⁴ Kuyper himself was not in parliament at this time, but a split in the ARP moved him to re-enter the *Staten Generaal* in 1894, and he rose to become the prime minister of the second ARP/Catholic government in 1901.⁵⁵ He was able to grant official recognition to private universities (of which, at that time, the *Vrije Universiteit* was the only one!), and canvassed some reforms to Dutch colonial policy.⁵⁶ Defeat in the 1905 election meant the ARP lost government. From the 1905 election defeat, Kuyper’s political career took a turn for the worse. His position as leader of the party came under question from within, and his control of the ARP slipped away as he aged.⁵⁷ He continued to edit *De Standaard* until 1919, and two years earlier saw full equity in state funding for

⁴⁵ Jellman, “Abraham Kuyper’s Attack”, pp.474-75.

⁴⁶ Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.305; James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, 2013), p.140.

⁴⁷ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.15.

⁴⁸ Arblaster, *A History*, p.187.

⁴⁹ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.44.

⁵⁰ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.12; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.305; Arblaster, *A History*, p.187; Jellman, “Abraham Kuyper’s Attack”, p.475.

⁵¹ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.46-48; Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist*, p.122.

⁵² Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.15.

⁵³ Jellman, “Abraham Kuyper’s Attack”, pp.475-77.

⁵⁴ van der Kroef, “Abraham Kuyper and the Rise”, p.332.

⁵⁵ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.13.

⁵⁶ McGoldrick, *God’s Renaissance Man*, p.59; Jellman, “Abraham Kuyper’s Attack”, p.478.

⁵⁷ Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, 2010), p.386.

religious schools via a constitutional revision.⁵⁸ Kuyper left parliamentary politics for the final time in 1920, resigning as leader of the ARP in the same year.⁵⁹ Kuyper died in November 1920.⁶⁰ McGoldrick notes that “by the end of his political career, Kuyper had achieved his goal of ‘an equitable public pluralism.’”⁶¹ We will now move to an exposition of Kuyper’s theory of pluralism, which he called sphere sovereignty.

Kuyperian Structural Pluralism

Abraham Kuyper’s vision for society was a pluralist vision. His own context, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Holland, was one of considerable religious and cultural diversity.⁶² While not diverse in the “multicultural” sense that the West experiences today, Dutch society was divided along diverse confessional and political lines. These divisions were made quite distinct in the late decades of the nineteenth century, through the political debates surrounding the “school struggle”.⁶³ Kuyper’s solution to the problem of governing this diversity was the Calvinist theory of sphere sovereignty. To translate sphere sovereignty into modern terms, what Kuyper offers here is a type of the “separation of powers” doctrine. The analogy is far from perfect, but it offers a picture of what is under consideration in the following paragraphs. At the foundation of this doctrine is the Calvinist doctrine of creation, which entails the inherent order of that creation.⁶⁴ Kuyper also sees significance in the “multiformity” of creation, or what Richard Mouw calls “many-ness” both in nature and in human society.⁶⁵ For Kuyper, then, both nature and human society display a God-imbued plurality. It is within this theological framework that Kuyper shapes his conception of sphere sovereignty. A clear explanation of sphere sovereignty, or as he expressed it “sovereignty in the individual social spheres”, is found in the third of his *Lectures on Calvinism*. Each of the social spheres, which include the family, commerce, science, art, education, and the state, derive the laws of their existence from God.⁶⁶ This aspect of sphere sovereignty shall be called Kuyper’s *structural pluralism*. The spheres of society are organic, that is, they grow out of the creation order.⁶⁷ As a part of this order, God has invested each sphere with its own sovereignty — they have been invested with their own authority.⁶⁸ Recalling the earlier comparison to the separation of powers doctrine, it is as though each of the spheres is separated by virtue of their own sovereignty. Or, as Kuyper states elsewhere, “[e]ach [sphere] obeys its own laws, and

⁵⁸ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist*, p.364; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.555; Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.12.

⁵⁹ McGoldrick, *God’s Renaissance Man*, pp.207-08.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.213.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.208.

⁶² Arblaster, *A History*, pp.2-3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, pp.568-69; Johan Goudsblom, *Dutch Society* (New York, 1967), pp.31-33.

⁶⁴ James W. Skillen and Rockne M. McCarthy, eds., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society* (Atlanta, 1991), pp.236-37; Peter S. Heslam, “Prophet of a Third Way: The Shape of Kuyper’s Socio-Political Vision”, *Journal of Markets and Morality*, Vol. 5, 1 (2002), p.17; Gordon J. Spykman, “Sphere Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition”, in David E. Holwerda, ed., *Exploring the Legacy of John Calvin: Essays in Honour of John Bratt* (Grand Rapids, 1976), p.165.

⁶⁵ Richard J. Mouw, “Culture, Church and Civil Society: Kuyper for a New Century”, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 28, 1 (2007), p.55.

⁶⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.77.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.78, 79.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.77; also see Abraham Kuyper, “Manual Labor”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.241.

each [...] stands under its own supreme authority”.⁶⁹ This authority is supreme only in an earthly or temporal sense, because all authority is granted to the spheres by the sovereign authority of God.⁷⁰ In summary, foundational to Kuyper’s political thought are: the order in creation; the plurality or “many-ness” inherent in creation; and God’s sovereignty over his creation. These ideas form the basis of the theory of sphere sovereignty, which in turn forms the basis of Kuyper’s political theory.

Abraham Kuyper did not articulate a systematic political theory, and his political thought is scattered throughout his various writings and speeches.⁷¹ He did, however, make some clear statements with regard to the role of the state, and the role of other institutions within society. Firstly, he opposed “state sovereignty”, developed by the Hegelian school of Germany.⁷² Secondly, he opposed “popular sovereignty” of the French Revolution.⁷³ “In opposition both to the atheistic popular sovereignty [...] and the pantheistic state sovereignty”, wrote Kuyper, “[...] the Calvinist maintains the sovereignty of God as the source of all authority among men.”⁷⁴ He has further scruples, though. Under the school of state sovereignty, society is swallowed up by the state, and this is reversed under the popular sovereignty school, where the state is consumed by society.⁷⁵ Kuyperian sphere sovereignty opposes each of these rival theories. Kuyper says that the state and society are not identical, as each possesses their own sphere sovereignty.⁷⁶ Society itself is broken up into smaller spheres, which each have their own inherent sovereignty and ordered place in God’s design.⁷⁷ Importantly, Kuyper does not place the state *above* the spheres of society, but alongside them.⁷⁸

The state is contained within its own sphere, and has a specific role to play. The duties of the government, writes Kuyper, are the imparting of justice and care for its people, both at home and abroad. This, he asserts, is “according to apostolic testimony”, thereby grounding his understanding of the role of the state in the writings of the New Testament.⁷⁹ The state should maintain order between the spheres of society by enacting laws, and thereby acting as an umpire between them.⁸⁰ However, its role and scope is limited and it cannot meddle in the individual spheres, or become “an octopus, which stifles the whole of life”.⁸¹ For example, in writing about the interaction between organised labour and employers, Kuyper states that the government, bound by the theory of sphere sovereignty, does not have the right to interfere directly in industrial disputes.⁸² He is critical of the Bismarckian welfare state

⁶⁹ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty”, in Skillen and McCarthy, *Political Order*, p.260.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.258; Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.81; Abraham Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, trans. Dirk Jellema (Grand Rapids, 1950), pp.51-52.

⁷¹ Sherrat makes this observation in, “Rehabilitating the State in America”, in Thomas W. Heilke and Ashley Woodiwiss, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science: Christian Scholars Engage Their Discipline* (Lanham, 2001), p.126.

⁷² Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.72; Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, pp.469-70; Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, p.45.

⁷³ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.72; Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.470-71.

⁷⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.76.

⁷⁵ Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, p.52.

⁷⁶ Kuyper, “Manual Labor”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.241; Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, p.52.

⁷⁷ Kuyper, “Manual Labor”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.241; Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.77-78.

⁷⁸ Skillen and McCarthy, *Political Order*, p.398.

⁷⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.79-80.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.83; Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.468.

⁸¹ Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, pp.57-58; Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.83.

⁸² Kuyper, “Manual Labor”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, pp.241, 54.

in Germany, and the submission of the people under it, seeing it as over-paternal and functioning outside its bounds.⁸³ He is critical of “Constantinianism” and the institutional union of church and state.⁸⁴ He rejects the traditional Calvinist position on the role of the civil magistrate in the punishment of heresy.⁸⁵ Indeed, the relationship between church and state is one of equality; they are differentiated and exist alongside each other, and mutually limit each other.⁸⁶ In short, Kuyper is an advocate of limited government, with the limits defined by the principle of sphere sovereignty. He gives definite role to the state; that of upholder of justice as umpire between the other social spheres and, as a last resort, within the spheres.⁸⁷ Kuyper also saw a limited state as fundamental to the church’s autonomy.⁸⁸ The church exists autonomously in a society brimming with institutions that exist within their own sovereign sphere, and that operate within the strict limits of those spheres.⁸⁹ This autonomous and separate operation is akin to a separation of powers between the societal spheres. Each sphere operates with a separate sovereignty. Therefore, it is not merely the state that is limited in its authority, but the church, the family, the school — all have limits on their authority.

Kuyperian World View Pluralism

A second aspect of Kuyperian pluralism is what has been termed *world view pluralism*. The variety seen in cultural expression is fundamental to the Christian understanding of the world, and is a key part of Kuyper’s thought.⁹⁰ Kuyper understood that everyone had a world view which informed each part of their life, and that each part of this life will find a natural institutional expression.⁹¹ As Wolterstorff asserts, Kuyper understood that people will often form “confessionally-oriented” institutions (e.g. Islamic schools, or Jewish butchers).⁹² By implication, then, Kuyper draws a clear line between religious conviction (or world view), and religious institution.⁹³

Therefore, the issue of church and state is entirely separate from the issue of “religious conviction” and the state.⁹⁴ Religious convictions, or world views, constitute a different category to that of institutions, hence the phrase *world view pluralism*. Therefore, sphere sovereignty also refers to a plurality of world views. At the bottom of this drive for world view pluralism, it seems that Kuyper has the Christian faith’s interests at heart. Kuyper’s world view pluralism allows people of all faiths, or none at all, to express that faith freely in public and private. Article 4 of Kuyper’s Anti-Revolutionary Party’s platform states that the government should allow the gospel to spread among the population, that it should not restrict individual conscience, that it should not interfere with the “spiritual development of the nation,” and that it should

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.253.

⁸⁴ Kuyper, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, p.31; Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp.87-88.

⁸⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁸⁷ Cf. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist*, p.135.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Abraham Kuyper on the Limited Authority of Church and State”, *The Georgetown Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 7, 1 (2009), p.112.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Bill Berends, “Pluralism and Nationhood”, *Vox Reformata*, No. 76 (2011), pp.69-70.

⁹¹ Wolterstorff, “Abraham Kuyper on the Limited”, p.116.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

treat all religious societies and churches as equals.⁹⁵ Kuyper states elsewhere that “the government must honor the complex of Christian churches as the multiform manifestation of the church of Christ on earth”.⁹⁶ According to Kuyper, it is under these conditions that the church can flourish; “a free church, in a free state”.⁹⁷ Calvinistic churches, Kuyper claims, in their multiplicity of institutions, have grown and flourished under the influence of liberty from the state.⁹⁸

Another important aspect of Kuyper’s theory of sphere sovereignty is his understanding of how different worldviews/religions interact in society. To give a specific example, Kuyper enunciates his structural pluralism with regards to scientific investigation and higher learning. In the fifth lecture on Calvinism, “On Calvinism and Science”, Kuyper states that the “church and state should withdraw [...] from university life, in order that the university may be allowed to take root and flourish in its own soil”.⁹⁹ In other words, the university is in a separate societal sphere from the church and the state, which are incompetent to have control over science (i.e. all scholarship) and learning.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the existence of state universities or church universities runs against the theory of sphere sovereignty. Thus freed from the state and the church, Kuyper claimed that the university could study the sciences without hindrance. Liberty for the university will result in progress in scientific research.¹⁰¹ Kuyper notes that various universities had been founded upon different fundamental principles, viewing this as “every leading life-system” expressing itself scientifically after freeing the universities “from all unnatural bonds”.¹⁰² He purports that any claim to a unity of science, of there being “one science only”, are spurious, and that the days of its unity are numbered by the inevitable split between Roman Catholic, Calvinistic and evolutionary thought.¹⁰³ “Different spheres of scientific life” will form, causing a “multiformity of universities” to be born.¹⁰⁴ Kuyper is here using the term *sphere* to refer to ideological groupings, and he expresses it as such when he says that, along with “different spheres of scientific life”, the world view groups must have “systems in science, coherence in instruction, unity in education”.¹⁰⁵

Sphere Sovereignty and the *Antithesis*

According to Kuyper, free universities lead to free investigation, and “free investigation leads to collisions”.¹⁰⁶ These “collisions” are collisions of principles. Theoretical schools are formed, and come into conflict with one another. According to Kuyper the greatest conflict is between those who are Christian and those who adhere

⁹⁵ Quoted in Bolt, “Abraham Kuyper and the Search”, in J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square* (Grand Rapids, 2006), p.153.

⁹⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.92.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.87-88.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹⁰⁰ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.180.

¹⁰¹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp.112-16; When using the word “science”, Kuyper was referring to “whole of human knowledge, including the humanities”. See Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.169.

¹⁰² Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.126; Cf. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids, 1954), p.167.

¹⁰³ Kuyper, *Lectures*, pp.125-26.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.184-85.

¹⁰⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.116; Cf. the discussion in Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, pp.160-61.

to some other form of world view.¹⁰⁷ This he called the *antithesis*.¹⁰⁸ According to this antithesis, Kuyper asserted that all science was divided in two according to this division between Christian and non-Christian.¹⁰⁹ A Christian is of a different kind to a non-Christian. One is in Christ, the other is in enmity against Christ.¹¹⁰ Their minds are different; one has been regenerated by God, and the other has not. “This antithesis”, claimed Kuyper, “is permanent and extends to every branch of scholarship.”¹¹¹ For the Calvinist, there is a fundamental, eternal difference between the believer and the non-believer. By asserting that there is a “Christian science” and a “non-Christian science”, Kuyper did not mean that there are two different truths and therefore radically different results of investigation. Activities such as weighing, measuring, and observing are non-scientific and therefore neutral.¹¹² Instead, Kuyper meant that scientists from Christian and non-Christian viewpoints will find their activities “[running] in opposite directions, because they have different starting points.”¹¹³ Their interpretations of what they observe will be antithetical because of their different foundational assumptions.¹¹⁴ For example, a naturalist biologist will observe the behaviour of cells, and interpret it as having come to that state by a series of random events. The Christian biologist will observe the same cells’ behaviour, and interpret it as designed and purposeful. In summary, because of the antithesis between the fundamental world views of the investigators, Kuyper believed that “both, as honest men, will feel duty bound to erect such a scientific edifice for the whole cosmos, which is in harmony with the fundamental data, given in their own self-consciousness.”¹¹⁵ According to Kuyper’s schema this is a positive thing, as the two types of scientists should be able to construct their own “scientific edifice” in order to proceed under their own fundamental principles.¹¹⁶

This principle of *antithesis* seems to work itself out logically to encompass more world views than the simple dichotomy between Christian and non-Christian. Kuyper does state that, despite the multiplicity of, and divergence between, non-Christian views, there is ultimately only the duality of Christian and non-Christian.¹¹⁷ There are only “two kinds of people,” he states.¹¹⁸ However, if one was to follow Kuyper’s line of thought regarding Christian and non-Christian, one could easily allow for the inclusion of other world views into the schema.¹¹⁹ In his *Lectures on Calvinism* he lists paganism, Islam, Roman Catholicism and Modernism as “general systems of life”.¹²⁰ Later, in the fifth lecture, Kuyper names three main world views as having their own

¹⁰⁷ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.116; Kuyper’s position regarding the “antithesis” is most comprehensively covered in Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.152.

¹⁰⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.117.

¹⁰⁹ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.154; Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.182-83.

¹¹⁰ S.U. Zuidema, *Communication and Confrontation* (Toronto, 1971), p.91.

¹¹¹ Cited in McKendree R. Langley, *The Practice of Political Spirituality: Episodes from the Public Career of Abraham Kuyper 1879-1918* (Jordan Station, 1984), p.112.

¹¹² Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids, 1959), p.125; cf. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, pp. 157, 59-60.

¹¹³ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.155.

¹¹⁴ Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept*, p.125; cf. Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.117.

¹¹⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.123.

¹¹⁶ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.182.

¹¹⁷ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.120.

¹¹⁸ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p.150.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.304.

¹²⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.11.

scientific sphere.¹²¹ Not only that, but Kuyper observed a multiplicity of other schools and intellectual streams forming and coming into conflict as a result of the liberation of the university from ecclesiastical and state control.¹²² In the cases where universities are free to encourage scientific investigation without hindrance from other spheres, Kuyper claimed that fundamental conflicts would form between those who are doing the investigating. These conflicts would result in the proliferation of world view-directed universities. Kuyper saw the existence of a multiplicity of world view-directed institutions as an inevitable result of the multiplicity of cultures and world views.

It is in his application of the concept of sphere sovereignty to confessional or world view groupings that Kuyper's idea of the *antithesis* is brought to bear. These groups are differentiated by the fundamental principles of their "life system" or world view. In his fifth lecture on Calvinism, Kuyper asserts that a "separation of adherents of antithetic principles" in science should be considered a progression along the natural lines of differentiation between worldviews.¹²³ The only way for independent schools of thought to flourish, according to Kuyper, was the establishment of separate institutions.¹²⁴ We see here the genius of Kuyper's conception of a plurality of world views in the public square. Different groups with separate fundamental principles, be they religious or not, should establish separate institutions. The argument Kuyper makes about the autonomy of science and the resulting plurality of intellectual and world view streams can be seen as an extension of his position in the political debate over education in the Netherlands.¹²⁵ In that debate there were two key factors for Kuyper. One was the founding of the *Vrije Universiteit*, and the other was his position during the "school struggle".

The *Vrije Universiteit* and the "School Struggle"

As already mentioned, Kuyper believed that people who hold to particular confessional or non-confessional views will express their views institutionally. The founding of the *Vrije Universiteit*, and Kuyper's address at the opening of that institution are evidence of this line of thought. The university was founded as a confessional institution, propounding Calvinist convictions throughout its faculties.¹²⁶ It was structurally independent of the state and of the church.¹²⁷ In his address at the opening of the *Vrije Universiteit*, Kuyper chose to speak on his theory of sphere sovereignty. He asserts the independence and sovereignty of the university over and against the sovereignty of the state. "How does the school I am introducing fit into the garden of Dutch society?" he asks.¹²⁸ Kuyper answers the question by explaining his pluralist vision of society. The *Vrije Universiteit*, he says, was founded as an expression of the theory of sphere sovereignty, where the power invested in the university is separated from that of any other sphere. "[God] delegates his authority to human persons", who exercise sovereignty over his creation and human society.¹²⁹ At the same time, the absolute sovereignty of sinful humans is intolerable, as Christ is the absolute sovereign.¹³⁰

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.125-26.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.125.

¹²⁴ Cf. Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.184.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.181.

¹²⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.125.

¹²⁷ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.47-48.

¹²⁸ Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty", in Skillen and McCarthy, *Political Order*, p.257.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.258-59.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.259.

Therefore, Kuyper states, God has divided human life into unique spheres and humans must exist in groups.¹³¹ At this point, Kuyper employs a memorable analogy to illustrate his structural pluralism. “Call the parts of this one gigantic machine [of society] cogwheels, each revolving on its own axle under its own power”, says Kuyper.¹³² This imagery is an alternative to the imagery of spheres which he normally uses, and he immediately makes that very equivalence. For, that is what Kuyper is saying the *Vrije Universiteit* is: a cogwheel, a sphere of society. The state, he asserts, “must see to it that the cogwheels operate as they are meant to”, in order to “make possible the free movement of life in and for each of these spheres”.¹³³ Kuyper goes on to say that “scholarship [i.e. science] produces its own life sphere” and should not be “under the guardianship of Church or State”.¹³⁴ Kuyper further explains the rationale for the university’s founding by appealing to the *antithesis* and the differentiation of fundamental principles. “[It] is within the Reformed spirit”, he propounds, “that we now ask for the sovereignty of our principle in our own scholarly sphere.”¹³⁵

Almost twenty years after the opening of the *Vrije Universiteit*, Kuyper expanded further on his structural pluralism with regards to scientific investigation and learning. In the *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered at Princeton in 1898, Kuyper said “church and state should withdraw [...] from university life”.¹³⁶ In other words, the university is in a separate societal sphere from that of the church and the state, which are incompetent to have control over science and learning.¹³⁷ Therefore, the existence of state universities or church universities runs against the separation of powers prescribed by the theory of sphere sovereignty. The confessional basis upon which the *Vrije Universiteit* was founded was Calvinistic, but it was not institutionally linked to any particular church. What we find in the example of the *Vrije Universiteit* is an institution operating in its own societal sphere, independent of the state and of the church. The “Free University” was founded free from ecclesiastical and state control.¹³⁸

Certainly, the *Vrije Universiteit* had a confessional position which it openly subscribed to. The university existed, in Kuyper’s words, “for the general cultivation of the sciences on the foundation of the Calvinistic principle”.¹³⁹ However, as already mentioned, Kuyper saw religious conviction and religious institutions as separate. As such, this situation did not contradict his structural pluralism. What we have in the example of the *Vrije Universiteit* is what Wolterstorff calls a “confessionally-oriented institution.”¹⁴⁰ In his lecture on Calvinism and science, Kuyper names as examples of this the humanist *Université Libre* in Brussels, the Roman Catholic universities in Dublin, Louvain, and Freiburg, and finishes his list with his own *Vrije Universiteit*.¹⁴¹ Kuyper is, at this point, showing his audience that the establishment of confessionally-oriented institutions is not peculiar to his own context in Holland, and he seems to take great encouragement from the proliferation of these institutions.¹⁴² One of Kuyper’s

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.259-60.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.260.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.261.

¹³⁴ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty”, in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.476.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.481.

¹³⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.125.

¹³⁷ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.180.

¹³⁸ Van Til, “Subsidiarity and Sphere Sovereignty”, p.622.

¹³⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.125.

¹⁴⁰ Wolterstorff, “Abraham Kuyper on the Limited”, p.116.

¹⁴¹ Kuyper, *Lectures*, p.125.

¹⁴² Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.184-85.

crowning achievements as Prime Minister was passing a Higher Education Bill which gave the *Vrije Universiteit* official recognition, allowing the examinations at the university to be granted the same rights as those at state universities.¹⁴³ At the time of the Bill's passage, the *Vrije Universiteit* was the only non-state university in Holland, and therefore the only institution to benefit from the new law.¹⁴⁴ However, from that point on, universities not founded and funded by the state were able to be legally recognised institutions of higher learning.¹⁴⁵ In the founding and legalising of the *Vrije Universiteit*, Kuyper showed a practical example of how his theory of sphere sovereignty works out with regard to higher learning.

The second example of Kuyper's political theory in practice is his position in the debates around the *schoolstrijd* or "school struggle".¹⁴⁶ The roots of the struggle can be found in the establishment of public schools in the Batavian Republic in 1806, which made all schools subject to the jurisdiction of the state.¹⁴⁷ When the Kingdom of the Netherlands was established, the situation remained the same, but the state continued to see itself as Protestant and therefore retained some Christian elements in schooling without being confessional.¹⁴⁸ Calvinists, led by Groen van Prinsterer, along with some Roman Catholics, began agitating for the ability to establish their own schools along confessional lines.¹⁴⁹ Illegal schools were set up by the conservative Calvinists, in order to emphasise their own faith and world view, and from 1848 public schools were closely monitored to maintain religious neutrality.¹⁵⁰ Interdenominational Christian schools were founded by the government in response to the Christian backlash, but the schools were denounced by the anti-revolutionary Groen as not Christian at all.¹⁵¹ Roman Catholics began opening their own schools also.¹⁵² Parallel education systems were in place, but the struggle continued. In 1878, Prime Minister Kappeyne introduced an Education Bill which centralised and transformed the education system. As a result, the cost of providing schooling was raised considerably, and independent schools were strangled into seeking state support in order to stay in business.¹⁵³ However, the government would offer no financial support to independent schools, but required particular, and costly, standards of them none-the-less.¹⁵⁴

Kuyper was ultimately not in favour of state funding for schools at all. His ideal was a school paid for by the parents, without intervention or assistance from the government.¹⁵⁵ This would mean that all schools, religious or not, should be entirely self-sustaining. Yet, it was the raised costs of education as result of the Education Act of 1878 which forced Kuyper into action. Early in his political career Kuyper had

¹⁴³ Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.495.

¹⁴⁴ McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man*, pp. 59, 204.

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed summary of the Bill, see Langley, *The Practice*, p.105.

¹⁴⁶ There are different translations of the Dutch phrase, but I have followed Kruijt, who calls it the "school struggle". See J.P. Kruijt, "The Influence of Denominationalism on Social Life and Organizational Patterns", *Archives de sociologie des religions*, Vol. 4, 8 (1959), p.108.

¹⁴⁷ Newton, *The Netherlands*, p.67.

¹⁴⁸ Johan Sturm *et al.*, "Educational Pluralism – A Historical Study of So-Called 'Pillarization' in the Netherlands, Including a Comparison with Some Developments in South African Education", *Comparative Education*, Vol. 34, 3 (November 1998), p.284.

¹⁴⁹ Kruijt, "The Influence of Denominationalism", p.108.

¹⁵⁰ Sturm *et al.*, "Educational Pluralism", p.285.

¹⁵¹ Newton, *The Netherlands*, p.68; Cf. Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p.296.

¹⁵² Sturm *et al.*, "Educational Pluralism", p.287.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*; Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, pp.301-02.

¹⁵⁴ Arblaster, *A History*, p.186.

¹⁵⁵ Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, p.233.

expressed the view that independent schools should receive funding equal to that of state schools, on the basis that parents who send their children to those schools pay the same tax rates as those who send their children to public schools.¹⁵⁶ Even though this view was contrary to his ideal, it was not a contradiction as such. His concern was for equality of funding: if the state was going to fund some schools, it should fund all schools. In 1878 Kuyper organised a petition to be presented to the King in response to the Education Bill, collecting a massive 305,000 signatures, not including 164,000 Catholic signatures which were also collected.¹⁵⁷ The organised backlash against the Bill can be considered one of the most significant moments in Dutch politics, as it spawned the organisation of its first mass party. Also of significance was the formation of a movement to found independent religious schools, and this in spite of the difficulty posed by the Education Bill.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Kuyper insisted on Calvinist schools for Calvinist children, the idea of which forms a clear outworking of his doctrine of the *antithesis*.¹⁵⁹ Progress was made in a Kuyperian direction in 1887 when a constitutional reform saw the ban lifted on state funding for religious schools.¹⁶⁰ The ARP/Catholic coalition government of 1889 passed a bill allowing state subsidies to religious schools, a small step in the direction of pluralistic equality.¹⁶¹ Kuyper's own time as prime minister did not see any significant movement on the school struggle. It was just three years before his death that he saw the adoption of what he had advocated some forty years before: in 1917, a constitutional amendment enshrining equal state funding to state and private schools.¹⁶² Later, secondary, technical and higher education institutions received the same treatment, with independent centres of learning receiving equal funding with state centres.¹⁶³

Both of these examples show Kuyper's political thought in action. His understanding of the *antithesis* between different world views is the foundation of his thought regarding sphere sovereignty and world view pluralism. Different world views, Kuyper says, have different fundamental starting points. He expressed it so when he stated that "every leading life-system" will naturally express itself institutionally in the sphere of science (i.e. scholarship). The natural outworking of this doctrine of the antithesis is shown in his application of it to the establishment of schools and universities. They should be established on the basis of world views. Calvinist schools for Calvinist children, Catholic schools for Catholic children. Kuyper's vision for society was one where each of the world view groups was able to express themselves institutionally. Reflecting on the development of Dutch society later in his career, Kuyper noted that the principle of separate world view institutions "sprang up with vigor and with correctly marked boundaries out of the free life of society, first in the area of education, then in the sphere of social organizations".¹⁶⁴

The proliferation of ideologically and confessionally-based organisations and institutions was Kuyper's pluralist vision for society. According to Kuyper, religious diversity would be best organised and governed if the diversity was not constrained by uniformity. Uniformity is not possible, due to the existence of the *antithesis*. Instead,

¹⁵⁶ Van der Kroef, "Abraham Kuyper and the Rise", pp.330-31.

¹⁵⁷ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, p.44; van der Kroef, "Abraham Kuyper and the Rise", p.331.

¹⁵⁸ Heslam, *Creating a Worldview*, pp.44-45.

¹⁵⁹ Arblaster, *A History*, p.187.

¹⁶⁰ Jellman, "Abraham Kuyper's Attack", p.476.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.476-77.

¹⁶² Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, p. 555.

¹⁶³ Kruijt, "The Influence of Denominationalism", p.108.

¹⁶⁴ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, p.485.

Kuyper saw religious diversity ideally being governed and managed by the free and meaningful expression of that diversity in a cacophony of societal expressions, particularly through the establishment of ideologically and confessionally-based organisations and institutions.

Conclusion

Justice cannot be done to the thought and impact of Abraham Kuyper in a single article. However, we have attempted to begin the process of unpacking Kuyper's political thought and the context within which it was developed and enacted. We have seen that Kuyper's time of theorising and influence was one of distinct change in the development of the modern nation state. After expounding his theories of sphere sovereignty and antithesis, some key examples from Kuyper's own career were given, exemplifying the practical implications of his thought. These real-life examples also show how Kuyper's theories and political actions form an undervalued but important development in the relationship between religion and the modern nation state. Kuyper encountered the problem of religious diversity, saw the need for a practical and theoretically sound solution to the problem, went into public life, and sought to shape a response. This response has influenced generations of Reformed and Calvinist political thinkers and social theorists, along with the whole of Dutch society. Indeed, the introduction of Kuyper's political ideas might have changed the tenure of the "poisonous debate" of 1962, when Bishop Cullinane closed his church's schools in the Australian Capital Territory. His thought could well prove important in any similar debates about the interaction of religion and the state in the future.