



## Neo-Calvinist Culture Protestantism: Abraham Kuyper's *Stone Lectures*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The article addresses Kuyper's re-interpretation of Calvinism, which allegedly combined the richness of its tradition with an endorsement of modern principles and ways of life (except for gambling, theater going, and some other minor activities). Yet the acceptance of the modern way of life did not mean secularism; on the contrary, according to Kuyper Calvinism in itself was a modern principle, which could – against the prevailing powers of a secularizing modernity – penetrate society as a whole.

### Keywords

Abraham Kuyper, Calvinism, Neo-Calvinism, Modernity, Culture Protestantism

### 1. Introduction

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) is probably the most influential Dutch politician and theologian of the modern era. His strong engagement in church affairs led to a decisive break in Dutch Protestantism, which was healed only a couple of years ago by the re-unification of the churches that were split in the *Doleantie*

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of 1892. Kuyper founded his own newspaper, his own Neo-Calvinist *Vrije Universiteit* (Free University) in Amsterdam and the first, modern political party in the Netherlands: the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (Anti-Revolutionary Party) (ARP). For a long time he was Member of Parliament, and from 1901 till 1905 he was Prime Minister. The segmented social structures – based on differences of religion and worldview – of the so-called *pillarized* Dutch society were to a large extent determined by Kuyper. His polarizing style was entirely new in Dutch politics and was an affront to the old elites who still clung to the ideals of a consensual and homogeneous state and an inclusive, Protestant people's church. His immense energy and capacity for work led to a series of nervous breakdowns, which were cured by stays abroad. His inclination to polemics (even against friends) seemed almost boundless, and Jeroen Koch's recent biography indeed shows that where Kuyper turned up, quarrels and arguments were never far away.<sup>2</sup> Right into the present he remains a controversial figure. One leading contemporary Neo-Calvinist historian claims that Koch (who does not belong to this tradition) treats Calvinism in the same way that nineteenth-century "enlightened" Westerners laughed at the idolatries of the indigenous peoples in the colonies.<sup>3</sup> This is a bit overstated, but it is true that Kuyper is depicted by Koch as a machinating opportunist, willing to do almost anything to reach his goals.

Kuyper's later thinking was based on the idea that (Neo-)Calvinism was not just a confession or a denomination, but formed principally a comprehensive philosophy and worldview in its own right.<sup>4</sup> It would be a gross misunderstanding to construe a mere antithesis between this *Weltanschauung* and the modern world. On the contrary, according to Kuyper Calvinism had made a distinct contribution to the emergence of such modern institutions and values as democracy and human rights. The main question here is rather simple: how did Kuyper construe this synthesis between (Neo-)Calvinism and modernity? The way I use the term "modernity" is not to be confused with Kuyper's highly polemical use of the term "modernism" (which stands for all he is against), but presupposes modern sociological theories about modernity that begin with the work of Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and Georg Simmel. In that

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<sup>2</sup> Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper. Een biografie* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> A.Th. van Deursen, Review of Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, in *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 17 May 2006.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed overview of the development of Kuyper's earlier views, see Jasper Vree, *Kuyper in de kiem. De precalvinistische periode van Abraham Kuyper 1848–1874* (Hilversum, 2006).

sense I use an external perspective to defend my thesis that Kuyper's rejection of a particular – secular – form of modernity did not imply a total rejection of modern life as such. Seen with this lens it is striking how “modern” Calvinism is. In a sense Calvinism represents the better (Christian) form of modernity, which could – against the prevailing powers of a secularizing modernity – penetrate society as a whole. In the course of this essay the various ways in which Kuyper's thought can be called “modern” (which, of course, is a broad and fuzzy concept) will be clarified.<sup>5</sup>

I will highlight Kuyper's overall program and impressive rhetorical skills. The focus is on his study of *Calvinism* that appeared in 1899 both in Dutch and English.<sup>6</sup> This book stems from the *Stone Lectures* delivered by Kuyper in 1898 at Princeton Theological Seminary. On this occasion he also received an honorary doctorate in law from Princeton University. Because Kuyper always explained his views in a strongly contextual way, it is hardly possible to pinpoint his final position. Nonetheless, these six lectures surely convey a good impression of what he was aiming at.

There exists an extensive literature about Kuyper.<sup>7</sup> At the centennial of the Stone Lectures in 1998 a probing book on Kuyper's Lectures appeared as well as an English anthology of his writings.<sup>8</sup> Conferences were organized in Princeton, Grand Rapids, and Amsterdam – the conference organized by the *Vrije Universiteit* of Amsterdam was titled: “Christianity and Culture: The Heritage of Abraham Kuyper on Different Continents.”<sup>9</sup> In the United States the interest in Kuyper is not solely of an historical nature, for some consider his work also to be “a charter for North American evangelicals engaged in

<sup>5</sup> Cf. James D. Bratt, ‘Abraham Kuyper: Puritan, Victorian, Modern,’ in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life. Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), pp. 3–21.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme. Zes Stone-lezingen in oktober 1898 te Princeton (N.-J.) gehouden* (Amsterdam, [1899]); A. Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone-Lectures* (New York, [1899]).

<sup>7</sup> Overviews are given by C.H.W. van den Berg, ‘Kuyper, Abraham,’ in *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme*, 6 vols. (Kampen, 1978–2006), 4: 276–283 and Adriaan Breukelaar, ‘Kuyper, Abraham,’ in *Biographisches-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, ed. F.W. Bautz and T. Bautz (s.l., 1992), 4: 846–851.

<sup>8</sup> Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998) and *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn, eds., *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work* [VU Studies on Protestant History 3] (Amsterdam, 1999) and *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life*, ed. Lugo (see above, n. 5).

today's cultural battles.”<sup>10</sup> But the interest in Kuyper is not restricted to those directly inspired by his vision. For instance, in the historiography of Western “ascetic Protestantism” (given a strong impetus by scholars such as Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch in 1900) Kuyper also plays an important role as a representative of a fundamental transformation of Calvinism.<sup>11</sup> These men admired Kuyper and – I would venture to say – were influenced by him in the strong contrast they saw between the culture-transforming powers of Calvinism and the weak character of their own state-Lutheranism. It can be no coincidence that Troeltsch, in his great study of the social teachings of Christian groups, cited in two different places the following observation of Kuyper: “Lutheranism remained ecclesiastical and theological; it is only Calvinism which both inside and outside the Church has left its mark upon all forms of human life. No one speaks of Lutheranism as the creation of a distinctive way of living; even the name is scarcely mentioned, whereas all who know history agree more and more in calling Calvinism the creator of a distinctive world of human life.”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Comparative Study of Worldviews

Kuyper's book on Calvinism contains six chapters of about 45 pages each, all of which probably go back directly to the lectures that Kuyper had given in Princeton. In a letter to his wife he complained about the fact that the lectures lasted about two hours, but – in a move that is typical of the man – he claimed

<sup>10</sup> John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2001), back flap.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen, 1912), pp. 607, 666, 731, 738–739, 769, 785, 790, and 792; idem, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols. (London, 1931), pp. 655, 660, and 676; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte. Nachlaß*, vol. 2: *Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 366–367. Cf. Wolfgang Schluchter and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, eds., *Asketischer Protestantismus und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus. Max Weber und Ernst Troeltsch* (Tübingen, 2005). Although Kuyper's thought is placed in the tradition of “ascetic protestantism,” he was not a traditional ascete, as he enjoyed the good things in life very much. His work ethos, however, was indeed a token of innerworldly ascetism.

<sup>12</sup> Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching* (see above, n. 11), p. 931, n. 414a, p. 946, n. 431, quoting (in English translation) the German edition of the Stone Lectures: A. Kuyper, *Reformation wider Revolution. Sechs Vorlesungen über den Calvinismus. Gehalten zu Princetown* [sic!] (Gr. Lichterfelde, 1904), p. 15; cf. the English version: Kuyper, *Calvinism* (see above, n. 6), p. 21.

at the same time that this made him aware of the success he had.<sup>13</sup> In the first chapter Kuyper contrasted the historically cultivated Europe with the more dynamic and fresh America, where the “train of life” moved on at a faster pace. In the next four chapters he dealt with the relation between Calvinism, on the one hand, and Religion, Politics, Science, and Art, on the other. The sixth and last lecture on Calvinism and the future started with a succinct summary of what had been achieved so far:

Calvinism *did* not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a *life-system*, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a *life* and *world-view*, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life. It raised our Christian religion to its highest spiritual splendor; ... it proved to be the guardian angel of science; it emancipated art; it propagated a political scheme, which gave birth to constitutional government, both in Europe and America; ... it put a thorough Christian Stamp upon home-life and family-ties.<sup>14</sup>

This looks great. Calvinism in this view forms an independent worldview which is of tremendous importance – also compared to other worldviews – for the emergence of modern institutions and cultural developments in general. At first sight there can be no doubt as to its bright future, but at closer inspection this is not so evident, for in fact Kuyper portrayed world history as an enormous struggle between the Christian and the modern element. The turning point was reached in 1789: at that time “the storm of Modernism has ... arisen with violent intensity” (3/2).<sup>15</sup> Modernism to Kuyper was not primarily a theological position,<sup>16</sup> but referred to a much wider phenomenon, which since the French Revolution has “spread like a cancer” and undermined Christian faith.<sup>17</sup> It is

<sup>13</sup> A. Kuyper, *Ik voel steeds meer dat ik hier zijn moest. Amerikaanse brieven van Abraham Kuyper aan zijn vrouw en kinderen*, ed. George Harinck and Margriet Urbanus (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 50: “Jammer slechts dat mijn lectures, door het langzaam spreken in een vreemde taal, te lang werden. Soms twee uur. Maar juist daardoor zag ik te beter, dat ik geslaagd was” (14 October 1898).

<sup>14</sup> Kuyper, *Calvinism* (see above, n. 6), p. 231 (emphasis in the original); cf. *Calvinisme* (see above, n. 6), p. 168. The English text differs here to a considerable extent from the Dutch original.

<sup>15</sup> The numbers in the text refer to the English and Dutch editions of the Stone Lectures.

<sup>16</sup> On his view of theological modernism, see Molendijk, ‘A Squeezed-Out Lemon Peel. Abraham Kuyper on Modernism,’ to be published in Leo Kenis and Ernestine van der Wall, eds., *Modernism in the Low Countries. A Comparative Approach* (Leuven, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Kuyper’s view of Modernism contains three elements according to Peter Heslam: the French Revolution, (German) Pantheism, and (Darwinistic) Evolutionism; cf. Heslam,

not sufficient, Kuyper argued, to oppose the Christian principle as such against the *ni Dieu ni maître* of Modernism. As Christianity finds its highest and most pure expression in Calvinism, the best opportunity for defense lies here. For Kuyper Calvinism in the sense of a comprehensive worldview is simply the best and most powerful form of Christianity.

The superiority of Calvinism is demonstrated by comparison with other “great complexes of human life” (12/8) with respect to their various views on God, man, and world. According to Kuyper, typical of Calvinism is the immediate relationship between God and man, whereas in Catholicism and Lutheranism the clergy plays a mediating role. This conviction also implies that Calvinism does not allow one to discriminate or mark distinctions between human beings, unless, of course, these are ordained by God. “Hence Calvinism condemns not merely all open slavery and systems of caste, but also all covert slavery of woman and of the poor; ... it tolerates no aristocracy save such as is able, either in person or in family, by the grace of God, to exhibit superiority of character or talent, and to show that it does not claim this superiority for self-aggrandizement or ambitious pride, but for the sake of spending it in the service of God” (27/19). Here Kuyper was extremely critical of Modernism, which levels out every difference between people and “cannot rest until it has made woman man and man woman, and ... kills life by placing it under the ban of uniformity” (26/19). Without making it explicit, the conclusion is evident: whereas Modernism implies compulsory homogeneity, Calvinism sets people free. Implicit in this whole discussion is a certain view of what true modernity is about: it is about freedom and plurality, which is guaranteed by Calvinism and not by an inherently oppressive Modernism.

Another element of Calvinism that enhances an affirmative and emancipatory mentality lies in the doctrine of common grace (*gemeene gratie*) “by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator” (30–31/22).<sup>18</sup>

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*Creating a Christian Worldview* (see above, n. 8), pp. 96–111; cf. p. 97: “Throughout his journalistic and political career, Kuyper made more frequent reference to the French Revolution than to any other historical event, including the Reformation. This was in large part due to the intellectual legacy of Groen van Prinsterer, who emphasized the antithesis between Christian Faith and the unbelief (*ongeloof*) of the French Revolution.”

<sup>18</sup> In Kuyper’s thought there is a place for natural theology; see A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* [original English translation 1898] (Grand Rapids, MI, 1954), p. 309: “Natural theology is and always will be the natural pair of *legs* on which we must walk,

This doctrine legitimizes the emancipation of (and in) various domains of life such as the arts, economy or welfare, whereas his understanding of the church in terms of the congregation of believers opens up the possibility for emancipation and separation in church affairs. In sociological terms: Calvinism is compatible with modern processes of differentiation and has also stimulated such (emancipating) developments. Contrary to the Anabaptists, true Calvinists do not reject the world, but engage themselves in it. “[T]he curse should no longer rest upon the *world* itself, but upon that which is *sinful* in it, and instead of monastic flight *from* the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God *in* the world, in every position of life” (31/23). In the same vein as Max Weber would do later in his *Protestant Ethic*, by showing the economic impact of the Puritan work ethic, Kuyper stressed (and, of course, overemphasized) the enormous contribution of Calvinism to modern, economic, societal and cultural developments in general.

Calvinism has taken a course westward and has now – Kuyper told his American audience – reached the United States. The whole world-historical construction is based on a comparative framework, which sees “Paganism,” “Islamism,” and “Romanism” as three phases in a development which has (nearly) reached its end, whereas Modernism and Calvinism are considered to be the ultimate competing powers at this very moment. The progress in history is to a large extent traced back to Calvinism, whereas Modernism is depicted as a new form of Paganism and, thereby, as a complex of human life which has no future. Although the results are diametrically opposed to each other, the way Kuyper proceeded shows a structural parallel to contemporary attempts of liberal theologians and scholars of religion who tried to demonstrate the superiority of their own point of view by way of comparison.<sup>19</sup>

In contradistinction to (most of) his liberal counterparts, Kuyper’s argumentation is put in strong, dynamic metaphors, which give the developments he outlined an aura of inevitability. History is a kind of survival of the fittest, during which Calvinism has good chances to win the battle. In this context Kuyper referred to the phenomenon of the “*commingling of blood* as ... the physical basis of all higher human development” (37/28). Looking at the crossing of different breeds in the world of animals and plants, it is “not difficult to

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while special revelation is the pair of *crutches*, which render help, as long as the weakened or broken legs refuse us their service.”

<sup>19)</sup> A good example are the *Gifford Lectures*, given by C.P. Tiele in 1899–1900 in Scotland; cf. Arie L. Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 143–179.

perceive that the union of natural powers, divided among different tribes, must be productive of a higher development” (39/29). Whereas in ancient times the commingling of blood still played a subordinate role, nowadays in Calvinist areas and especially in America it is a crucial phenomenon. Additionally, it is important to notice that Calvinism has sprung in a spontaneous way from ordinary people, which gives it an enormous power, as is proven by the victory of the Dutch over the Spanish occupation in the seventeenth-century struggle for liberation. At the end of the first lectures Kuyper quotes the Dutch, liberal historian Robert Fruin, saying: “wherever Protestantism has had to establish itself at the point of the sword, it was Calvinism that gained the day.”<sup>20</sup> If even his opponents admitted this fact, how true must it be!

### 3. The Cultural Impact of Calvinism

The framework of a comparative analysis of worldviews is most conspicuous in the first and last (sixth) chapter of the *Stone Lectures*. In between Kuyper sketched the essentials and impact of Calvinism. He considered it to be a type of the genus religion (or worldview) and characterized it by addressing questions such as: “Does this religion exist for the sake of *God*, or for *Man*?” and “Can it remain *partial* in its operations or has it to embrace the *whole* of our personal being and existence?” (49/37) Although he criticized modern philosophy of religion, without specifying what philosophers he had exactly in mind, he did share – at least some of – their assumptions. Kuyper obviously didn’t share the same opinions as these (liberal) philosophers and theologians, but he did argue on the basis of human subjectivity as well. For Kuyper, however, human subjectivity was not founded in the autonomous self, but in a consciousness of guilt and sin: “In this spiritual experience of sin, in this empirical consideration of the misery of life, in this lofty impression of the holiness of God, and in this staunchness of his convictions, which led him to follow his conclusions to the bitter end, the Calvinist found the roots of the necessity first of *Regeneration*, for real *existence*, and secondly, the necessity of *Revelation*, for clear consciousness” (66–67/48). Other doctrines are “deduced” in a similar way.

In the lectures Kuyper also presented his ecclesiastical and moral views. He rejected the idea of a church as a *Heilsanstalt* (institute of grace) and was very critical of the idea of a national (or people’s) church. “A national

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Fruin, *Tien jaren uit den Tachtigjarigen Oorlog 1588–1598* (Leiden, 1857), p. 151 (in the 6th ed. (Den Haag, 1904), p. 217).



Church, i.e., a church comprising only one nation, and that nation entirely, is a Heathen, or at most, a Jewish conception” (80/57). Notwithstanding “much unholy rivalry,” it is evident for Kuyper that the pluriformity of denominations “has been much more favorable to the growth and prosperity of religious life than the compulsory uniformity in which others sought the very basis of their strength” (79/56). Crucial is here the acceptance of a plurality of worldviews and churches. With regard to morality and ethics, Kuyper claimed that the whole of human (moral) life is ultimately founded in God, which assumption is expressed in the doctrine of the “ordinances of God” (87/61) that rule over every area of human conduct. These ordinances are basically the same as the general moral commandments: For “can we imagine that at one time God willed to rule things in a certain moral order, but that now, in Christ, He wills to rule it otherwise?” (89/62)

Of course, Kuyper wanted to outline the distinctive elements of Calvinism, but, on the other hand, it is clear from the way he presented this type of religion that it sits well with the conditions of the modern era. Although he was critical of dancing, card playing, and theatre-going, the Calvinist “ordinances” hardly differ from common moral rules. The teaching of common grace allows for an active engagement in worldly affairs (apart from the just mentioned, three exceptions) and Kuyper’s church concept (in terms of competing denominations) is very appropriate in the Dutch situation, where thanks to – among others – Kuyper himself a market of competing churches emerged. In the long run this made the old, liberal idea of an encompassing national, Protestant church obsolete.

Next, Kuyper turned to a discussion of the importance and influence of Calvinism in the fields of politics, scholarship (sciences and humanities), and the arts. The first step, again, is crucial: The fact that these areas have emancipated themselves from the influence of institutionalized religion (the churches) does not imply in the least that they are neutral with regard to religion or worldview. On the contrary, these are conflicted fields, where various worldviews compete. Let me give an example. Kuyper claimed that opposed to a modern (modernistic) concept of the state that denies the existence of God there is a Calvinist view based on the principle of the sovereignty of God. This last doctrine means that in the fields of politics, society, and the organization of religion, et cetera, there can only be a subordinate sovereignty. In the realm of politics the direct government of God is broken down by sin, it is substituted by human government “as a mechanical remedy” (108/76). This form of (human) government and state formation is in this view something artificial, whereas realms such as the family and scholarship are organically

formed, which means that the state has to be reticent in these affairs. Here we find the well-known, Neo-Calvinist doctrine of (people's) "sovereignty in its own circles" (*souvereiniteit in eigen kring*), translated in the English edition as "sovereignty in the sphere of society" (116). By this principle is meant "that the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the State, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does" (116/82). This is the short-hand, Neo-Calvinist version of the subsidiarity principle.

This principle served Kuyper rather well in claiming freedom from direct state intervention in societal realms which could be better run by the people and social organizations. This was a normative claim, which, however, was also historically substantiated. In these lectures he focused on the realms of politics, scholarship, and the arts, whereas the fields of economy and education, where (Neo-)Calvinism indeed had been rather successful, were mentioned, but not extensively discussed. In the political realm Kuyper opposed the Calvinist freedom of conscience against the revolutionary freedom of the guillotine. Calvinism contributed to the advancement of the sciences as well. After the Middle Ages with its emphasis on life after death, the Calvinist doctrine of common grace "threw open again to science the vast field of the cosmos" (154/110). Did not Calvin compare the Scriptures to a pair of spectacles, "enabling us to decipher again the divine Thoughts, written by God's Hand in the book of *Nature*, which had become obliterated in consequence of the curse?" (158/113). In this view common grace arrests the total depravity effected by sin (162/116) and makes the created world into a legitimate object of study.

After arguing that Calvinism has stimulated free scholarship, Kuyper noticed that this freedom can lead to conflict and differences of opinion. The biggest conflict is that between "those who cling to the confession of the Triune God and His Word, and those who seek the solution of the world-problem in Deism, Pantheism and Naturalism" (173/124). This is not the struggle between faith and science, which according to Kuyper simply does not exist. Science is based on presuppositions: faith in our self-consciousness, in the accurate working of our senses, in something universal hidden behind the special phenomena, "and especially ... in the principles, from which we proceed" (173/124). Basically, it is the conflict between the so-called "normalists," who reckon only with natural data and explanations, and the so-called "abnormalists," who accept the possibility of miracles and "maintain inexorably the conception of man as

an independent species, because in him alone is reflected the image of God” (175/125). In the last resort, we have to acknowledge here the existence of two diametrically opposed kinds of human consciousness, “that of the regenerate [born-again, ALM] and the unregenerate” (183/130).

The problem according to Kuyper is that the normalists urge their conviction upon the abnormalists. They wish “to wrest from us the very thing, which, in our self-consciousness, is the highest and holiest gift, for which a continual stream of gratitude wells up from our hearts to God” (184/131). By presenting modern scholarship as also based on (a particular) faith, the whole problem boils down to a struggle of faiths, in which one group tries to enforce its point of view and, therewith, neglects the freedom of its opponents. This way the normalists are depicted as tyrants, whereas “we” only defend our freedom and respect our adversaries. This change of perspective enables an extremely powerful rhetoric: “That they, from their standpoint pull down everything that is holy in your estimation, is unavoidable. Instead of seeking relief ... in downhearted complaints ..., the energy and the thoroughness of our antagonists must be felt by every Christian scholar as a sharp incentive himself also to go back to *his* own principles in his thinking, to renew all scientific investigation on the lines of these principles, and to glut the press with the burden of his cogent studies” (185/132). This implies a radical university reform, but, fortunately, this is already under way. The curse of uniformity has to be broken in the field of scholarship and science as well. True freedom of scholarship will only be established if one acknowledges the fact that “normal science” is also based on a principle of faith.

We must have systems in science, coherence in instruction, unity in education. That is only really free, which, while it is strictly bound to its own principle, has the power to free itself from all unnatural bonds. The final result, therefore, will be, thanks to Calvinism, which has opened for us the way, that liberty of science will also triumph at last; first by guaranteeing full power to every leading lifesystem, to reap a scientific harvest from its own principle; – and secondly, by refusing the scientific name to whatsoever investigator dare not unroll [every investigator who dares not unroll, ALM] the colours of his own banner, and does not show emblazoned on his escutcheon in letters of gold the very principle, for which he lives, and from which his conclusions derive their power. (188/134)

On this basis Kuyper justified the foundation of his own Neo-Calvinist university in Amsterdam in 1880.

#### 4. The Struggle for a Calvinist Modernity

After a brilliant exposition of the profound cultural-historical significance and broad influence of Calvinism, Kuyper reached a new rhetorical climax in the last chapter, by striking a rather unexpectedly pessimistic note. “Modern life” has broken with the Christian tradition and is not any longer founded on God and ideals, but on material and instinctual needs. Money, lust and power are its key values. The danger exists that the democratic principles are replaced by the “coarse and overbearing *kratistocracy* of a brutal money-power” (246/177). As neither Catholicism nor (liberal) Protestantism is the answer to this threatening condition, the long-expected solution is formulated as follows:

There is no choice here. Socinianism died an inglorious death; Anabaptism perished in wild revolutionary orgies. Luther never worked out his fundamental thought. And Protestantism taken in a general sense, without further differentiation, is either a purely negative conception without content, or a chameleon-like name which the deniers of the God-man like to adopt as their shield. Only of Calvinism can it be said that it has consistently and logically followed out the lines of the Reformation, has established not only churches but also States, has set its stamp upon social and public life, and has thus, in the full sense of the word, created for the whole life of man a world of thought entirely its own. (261/187–188)

By a breath-taking, world-historical comparison, Kuyper guided his listeners and readers to the only viable, narrow way of Calvinism. Salvation is not expected from the own (small) group, but from Calvinism as a world-historical principle: the train of life has to follow again the track of divine commandments (240/174). Only Calvinism is able to defend the Christian faith “in this hour of sharpest conflict, against renewed Paganism collecting its forces and gaining day by day” (272–273/195). Calvinism thus is the final station of the history of religious development and at the end of this journey it has to fight the devastating Modernism. This antagonism is the basic structural element of the *Stone Lectures*, which gives the book a dynamic sweep that carries the readers off and empowers them.

Kuyper’s comparative, teleological method can be found in much of the philosophical and religious studies literature of his day. In this sense the book has a modern character and is not a species of (classical) dogmatics. The references to the Bible illustrate the argument, rather than acting as arguments in themselves. The comparison between religions and worldviews with regard to their notions of God, man, and world is also found in contemporary philosophy of religion. Talking about Calvinism as a worldview is equally

modern in that it presupposes a plurality of worldviews that are principally on a par with each other (although the differences between them, of course, can be profound).<sup>21</sup> In the same vein as Adolf Harnack in his famous lectures at the University of Berlin discussed the essence of Christianity, so in Princeton Kuyper presented Calvinism as the only type of religion that had a future and could successfully confront secular Modernism.<sup>22</sup>

Not only his method, but also his theoretical framework is modern. The basic presupposition of his view of modern history is the ongoing process of differentiation between spheres such as the state, the economy, religion, art, and scholarship. Calvinism has stimulated this process according to Kuyper and is thus in this respect typically modern. It also opposed patronizing authority and the Calvinist movement has thus contributed to the spread of freedom in the world. Kuyper's presentation can be criticized, of course, but the view that Christianity or – more precisely – specific Christian groups such as the Mennonites or “ascetic Protestantism” have contributed to the emergence of the modern world was shared by several authors at the time.<sup>23</sup>

Kuyper loved metaphors depicting the struggle for existence and power. Calvinism is essentially a life principle that has to establish itself as the mightiest in the struggle for life. How Christian convictions of charity and caring for the poor and needy are related to this is not completely clear. It was evident for him that one human being has the right to dominate the other one.<sup>24</sup> “There is no equality of persons. There are weak narrow-minded persons, with no broader expanse of wings than a common sparrow; but there are also broad, imposing characters, with the wing-stroke of the eagle. Among the last you will find a few of royal grandeur, and these rule in their own sphere, whether people draw back from them or thwart them; usually waxing all the stronger, the more they are opposed” (122/87). Clearly, Kuyper was impressed by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Did not Nietzsche juxtapose the lamb that takes away the sins of the world and the eagle? “We are not ill disposed to you, dear

<sup>21</sup> In older ages (true) Christian faith was simply opposed to superstition or false beliefs.

<sup>22</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums. Sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Fakultäten im Wintersemester 1899/1900 an der Universität von Berlin gehalten von Adolf v. Harnack*, ed. Claus-Dieter Osthövener (Tübingen, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Georg Jellinek, *Die Erklärung der Menschen- und Bürgerrechte. Ein Beitrag zur modernen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1904) and Ernst Troeltsch, *Schriften zur Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die moderne Welt (1906–1913)* [Kritische Gesamtausgabe 8], ed. Trutz Rendtorff (Berlin, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> There is at least a tension between Kuyper's praise of Calvinist freedom and his own authoritarian instincts.

lambs; we are even fond of you, for nothing is tastier than tender lamb.”<sup>25</sup> But Calvinism is not only a life principle, as is evident from the following passage: “The tree blossomed and yielded its fruit, but without any one having made a botanic study of its nature and growth” (266–267/191). Kuyper saw it as his task to frame this life principle in a conceptual manner. It looks almost as if he thought that only as a reflective principle Calvinism could gain the victory. In place of the Darwinist principle of selection, Kuyper put the doctrine of election. He tells us that Calvin had noticed the same problem as Darwin, but he solved it “not in the sense of a blind selection stirring in unconscious cells, but honouring the sovereign choice of Him Who created all things visible and invisible” (271/194–195).

## 5. Conclusion

Societal differentiation did not imply for Kuyper that religion – that is Calvinism – would be confined to its own domain. Every societal sphere is according to him determined by principles. The two leading and diametrically opposed powers are Modernism and Calvinism. Calvinism is thus not a purely religious or ecclesiastical principle (distinct from the realms of culture and society), but a principle that pervades these realms and has to do so in its struggle against the destructive power of Modernism. In a good democratic fashion the plurality of formative principles is acknowledged and accepted. If some scholars reject the “abnormal” science of the Calvinists (which accepts the possibility of miracles and is founded on “regenerated” consciousness), then they are intolerant, whereas “we” accept a variety of universities based on different worldviews. The claim of “normal” science to produce generally valid and intersubjective knowledge is deconstructed in an ideological-critical way as being premised on principles of faith.

In contrast with liberal Protestantism Kuyper did not see culture as a more or less independent domain (with its own rules), but as something that has to be formed by different (and often opposed) principles. In both cases Protestantism

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted after A. Kuyper, ‘The Blurring of the Boundaries,’ in *Kuyper*, ed. Bratt (see above, n. 8), pp. 363–402, p. 366 [= *De verflauwing der grenzen* (Amsterdam 1892), p. 6], who referred to “Dr. Hugo Kaatz,” *Die Weltanschauung Nietzsches*, 2 vols. (Dresden, 1892), 2: 29. In the Dutch text Kuyper misquotes Kaatz (and Nietzsche). Cf. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, I, 13: “Wir sind ihnen gar nicht gram, diesen guten Lämmern, wir lieben sie sogar: nichts ist schmackhafter als ein zartes Lamm.” In the *Stone Lectures* (246/177) he criticized “von Nietzsche” and his Social-Darwinist views as well.

relates in a positive way to society (culture). By rejecting energetically a more or less neutral view of culture, Kuyper initiated a large reform programme that demands the distribution or even division of societal spheres along lines of confessions and worldviews. In this way he struggled for his own (Calvinist) space in a culture that was dominated by modernist principles. This marks a huge difference with the cultural Protestants who strive for a synthesis between culture and Christianity and who reject the societal and ecclesiastical segmentation as propagated by Kuyper.

Kuyper's force of persuasion lies not only in his rhetorics, but also in his theory of the origins of modernity.<sup>26</sup> Societal differentiation, the separation between church and state, and the democratic principle as such are socio-political developments brought along to a large extent by Calvinism. The modern world, therefore, is not the monopoly of (secular) modernists, but a place in which pluralism should rule in various spheres of human life. In this sense Calvinism represents a modernity that is more modern than that of the modernists, who wish it were otherwise and claim hegemony for their own point of view. Further, I have argued that the comparative and teleological way he constructed history – with Calvinism on top – is structurally similar to modern (liberal) theologies and philosophies of religion. And also his use of modern media such as (stump) speeches, brochures, and journals to mobilize people and build strong institutions is very much a modern phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

My aim has been predominantly to show how persuasively Kuyper depicted Calvinism as representing the modern principle of freedom – certainly in the eyes of his constituency. The question whether the historical view he presented is correct is another issue. From the very beginning this was heavily contested. Ernst Troeltsch, for one, characterized the *Stone Lectures* as follows: “This book is not only Kuyper's government programme, but, consisting of the lectures delivered at the University of Princeton, which is strictly Calvinistic, it constitutes a kind of collective creed of modern orthodox Calvinism. Otherwise in an absolutely unprecedented degree Neo-Calvinism is here read into the primitive Calvinism of Geneva. It is the book of a dogmatist and a politician, and as such it is extremely instructive; as an historical work, however, it is

<sup>26</sup> Arie L. Molendijk, “‘Mine’. The Rhetorics of Abraham Kuyper”, to be published in *Journal for the History of Modern Theology*.

<sup>27</sup> On Kuyper as a modern politician see Henk te Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap. Persoon en politiek van Thorbecke tot Den Uyl* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 55–103.

very misleading.”<sup>28</sup> This judgment may be correct, but it takes nothing away from the fact that “Mighty Abraham” was not only one of the first modern politicians, but also presented a theory of modernity in which religion – or more precisely: Calvinism – played a formative role.

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<sup>28</sup>) Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching* (see above, n. 11), 2: 879, n. 309; *Die Soziallehren* (see above, n. 11), p. 607, n. 309.