

1837 - 1987

REFLECTIONS ON THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BIRTH OF DR. ABRAHAM KUYPER

PETER Y. DE JONG

October 29 of this year deserves to be remembered with gratitude by Reformed believers throughout the world. On that date 150 years ago Abraham Kuyper was born in Maasluis, an obscure fishing village in the Netherlands.

For longer than half a century he helped reshape the contours of church, society and state in his country as it moved out of the 19th century into the 20th. Although this would have been impossible without the support of many followers, his vigorous leadership revitalized Reformed thought and action to meet the challenges of the new day which changed the face of the Netherlands. For that his opponents ridiculed, feared and hated him; for that tens of thousands eagerly took up the cause which he championed with words which were "like apples of gold in settings of silver." Even now he deserves to be remembered with deep respect.

Such a response does not come easy today. Past events and persons seldom are accorded more than a casual nod.

Scholars, to be sure, will continue to engage in meticulous research in an attempt to understand the past; the fruits of their labors seldom appeal to the masses whose chief concern is to experience, exploit and enjoy only the passing moment. Soon their world shrinks to the size of their own little lives without roots to nourish the soul. They live without meaning and direction, without commitment to God in whose hand lies the destiny of all men and nations. To them, as Longfellow once opined, reflection on times past is an exercise in futility:

The history of the past is a mere puppet-show. A little man comes out and blows a little trumpet, and goes in again. You look for something new, and lo! another little man comes out, and blows another little trumpet, and goes in again. And it is all over.

Not so do Christians regard the past. Their understanding of history is molded by Holy Scripture. Ignorance here is for them always a serious sin, the consequences of which set the teeth of themselves and their children sharply on edge.

The God of all the earth commands us to remember his words and mighty works. He raises up one nation and casts down another to work his sovereign will. In Jesus Christ, Lord of all history, he engages in gathering, defending and preserving a people for his own possession. In this he is pleased to use men and women to serve his good pleasure. He ordains their place in the drama of world events. He endows them with gifts which enable them to accomplish his purposes. And whether success crowns their efforts or failure, as men esteem this, dogs their steps, he works all things to his glory. All, indeed, retain full responsibility for their lives, for never does God treat people like puppets. For them every new day is bright with his promise and power.

This sovereign God also raised up Abraham Kuyper to become a blessing and challenge for the church. On the honor roll his name deserves a place.

Today he is remembered chiefly as a churchman who aroused many to their high calling in a society which had drifted far from its historical Christian moorings.

Closely associated with this were his contributions as a Reformed theologian. In obedience to the Word he opened new perspectives, which insights enabled many to meet the intellectual and scientific challenges of a fast-changing world.

All this Kuyper did as one who understood his time and spoke persuasively in language which the common man could grasp. For decades these folk had been despised by a ruling elite in church and state. Hardly anywhere was their

voice heard. He drew them out of their cultural isolation and impotence. He stirred them to action by inspiring their lives with what he called "Calvinism" as the most consistently biblical life and world-view. With superb organizational talent he welded all who caught his vision into a force with which everyone in the Dutch nation had to reckon. Once again confessional Christianity received a hearing. For a short season, even though his supporters seldom numbered more than ten percent of the citizenry, the reins of the government were largely in his hand. Almost larger than life Kuyper strode across the stage of those years.

* * *

But what kind of a man was he?

Here some biographical details are not inappropriate.¹

Kuyper was the third child and oldest son of Jan Frederik Kuyper and Henriette Huber. The mother was of Swiss descent. The father served as pastor of several Reformed (Her-vormde) congregations. His views can best be described as "moderately orthodox," never attacking the authority of Scripture but seldom dealing with doctrines which give the Reformed faith its strength. The family belonged to the middle class. Christianity was largely thought of as doing one's duty to God, others and country. Scripture reading and prayer were the order of each day to leave a lasting stamp on young Abraham's life. All his early education was received at home. Not for a single day did he sit on a school bench.

By his eighteenth year he enrolled in belles-lettres and theology at the prestigious University of Leiden.²

Here were brilliant teachers who introduced into the Reformed Church a well-formulated modernism which soon came to dominate its boards and pulpits.³ These teachings, while never completely capturing his heart, stimulated his intellect. Here he learned much which served him well in later life. His eyes were opened to the rich past of the Dutch nation. Under the tutelage of De Vries he gained deep appreciation for that language in which he was to write in journals, pamphlets and large treatises, always with unusual

power and precision. In him his professors saw a student of great promise.

Completing the preparatory courses, Kuyper decided to prepare for the ministry. But he was no longer the young man who had begun his studies. Years later he described what had taken place.

I entered the university a young man of orthodox faith, but I had not been in school more than a year and a half before my thought processes had been transformed into the starker intellectual rationalism.⁴

Yet his decision gave him no qualms of conscience. In the Reformed Church at that time every kind of belief and unbelief could be preached with impunity. The ministry offered a measure of social standing together with relative financial security. With such a broad-minded church he was quite content.

Little change took place during the years of studying theology in depth.

Liberalism was well entrenched in Leiden. Rauwenhoff taught church history and interpreted the facts according to his modernistic convictions. At one time, when this professor in rationalistic fashion denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Kuyper joined the applause. Kuenen, soon to win wide acclaim beyond the confines of his own land, introduced him to the methods and results of Old Testament higher criticism. But Scholten excelled all his colleagues. Here was a consistent thinker, a scholar whose acquaintance with his field was unparalleled in those days, and an enthusiastic teacher. Always his students thronged to hear him. He taught dogmatics in a way which fascinated Kuyper. Each doctrine under consideration was traced back to the Bible, then explained in its development through the centuries until it found classic formulation in the Reformed creeds, and finally so interpreted as to be attractive to the thinking mind which trusted only man's reason. Scholten scoffed at the inconsistencies of the old supranaturalism in which many a preacher still lay entangled. Still more did he ridicule the idealistic views of the Groninger school for its

superficial scholarship.

Kuyper's intellect fell captive to these teachings because they offered a consistent interpretation of the world. Here were no half-way measures; no half-hearted allegiances. Prayer had now become no more than a formality. Scripture was read only so far as it served his studies.

His heart, however, found no rest.

How, then, did he become such a valiant champion of the Reformed faith as expressed in the official creeds of the church? The story of his conversion to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of his life involved three episodes, each separated from the others by a few years. All affected the course of his life profoundly.

While engaged in theological studies Kuyper was encouraged by De Vries to submit a treatise in which the views of Calvin and a Lasco on the church were to be compared. For the best study submitted the faculty of the University of Groningen would award the gold medal. Thorough investigation of primary sources, of course, was expected. All the works of Calvin were readily available; a complete set of a Lasco's could be found nowhere, not even in the largest European libraries. In a most surprising way, responding to a passing suggestion from De Vries, Kuyper obtained these from a Reformed minister in Haarlem. In this he recognized the providence of God and for the first time in many months offered a sincere prayer of thanks and praise. Written in elegant Latin, his treatise was awarded the prize. Now his reputation as a scholar was firmly established.⁵

These months took their toll. Overworked to the point of complete exhaustion, he found he could not even read with profit. Upon advice of the family physician the young student took a six-week vacation in Germany. While convalescing he turned for diversion to Charlotte M. Yonge's novel, *The Heir of Redclyffe*. The story soon gripped his soul. In the arrogant hero he recognized himself and his spiritual poverty. He learned what none of his brilliant professors understood--how a faithful church ministered to a heart torn

by ambition and pride. Such a church was, indeed, a spiritual mother. Of it Calvin had written in glowing terms. But nowhere had Kuyper found such a church. Striving for it within the Reformed Church which he pledged himself to serve now became a controlling passion in his life.

Soon he returned to his theological studies at the university. Hearing how and why Scholten had again changed his mind on the genuineness of John's gospel, Kuyper consciously broke with the higher critical approach to the Bible. Within ten months he finished courses and was awarded the degree of doctor of theology.⁶ The way to a pulpit and pastorate was now open.

Called after almost a year of waiting by the congregation of Beesd, a small village in Gelderland, he accepted and was ordained by his father on August 9, 1863. One month earlier he married Johanna Hendrika Schaay, an educated but worldly young lady who also knew nothing of salvation by God's grace. Together they took their place in church and community.

At this time the young pastor could be considered neither orthodox nor liberal. Much of what he had learned at Leiden still shadowed his preaching and pastoral care. The majority of his parishioners were well satisfied with his sermons. His repeated references to Scripture and persuasive speech won their allegiance. But among a small group of "malcontents" he found no hearing. Often they absented themselves from divine worship, content to find their spiritual food in the "old writers." But these, too, Kuyper believed should be won back for the church.

Despite repeated rebuffs he persisted in calling at their homes. While respecting his office, they began with much reticence to explain what they missed in his messages. In them was no call to genuine repentance, no awakening to the sinner's deep need for Jesus Christ, no understanding that salvation was entirely the work of the sovereign God. On this they would not yield for a moment. Their patience and persistence soon deeply troubled him. Could it be that they, rather than he with all his education, were right? Soon his

wife became as troubled as he. Even his messages evidenced a change. Trained to be consistent in thinking as well as in practice, Kuyper realized he was facing a profound spiritual crisis. The choice lay between what he had learned at the university and what these simple folk so firmly believed. Several years later he wrote of this experience:

I did not set myself against them and still thank my God that I made the choice I did. Their unwavering persistence has been the blessing for my heart. I had the rise of the morning star in my life. I had been taken hold on but had not yet found the word of reconciliation. They brought me, in their simple language, to that absolute form in which alone my soul could find rest: in the adoration and exaltation of a God who worketh all things, both to do and to will, according to his good pleasure.⁷

Although not yet fully aware of its implications, this conviction guided him throughout the rest of his years.

Soon thereafter Kuyper increasingly recognized what was wrong in the Reformed Church. It cared little for the common folk who constituted the majority of its membership. They had no voice in the church, still less in society and state. Few seemed to care for their souls. In many of the churches stones were served instead of spiritual bread. Nor was there a concerted effort to provide a Christian education for most of the children. Poverty was rife because of low wages; the homes of the poorer classes were hovels. In the political order leaders were living the lie, proclaiming their concern for liberty, equality and fraternity while obstructing every attempt at reform. The Dutch nation had fallen to a low estate because it rejected the Christian heritage which in earlier years had made it great for a season.

Recognizing this as the light of Scripture dawned on his soul, Kuyper began to call for changes. And these, while urgent for every area and relationship of life, were to be made first of all in the church.⁸ Only by returning to the gospel in all its purity and power was there any hope for personal, social and national renewal. With such convictions he began and continued his labors until the day of his death.

To the service of this sovereign God who had led him to salvation in Jesus Christ by grace alone he now surrendered himself wholeheartedly.

* * *

To rehearse the course of Kuyper's career which embraced more than fifty years would fill volumes. Only a few of the more outstanding events will detain us here.

From 1863 to 1874 he served as pastor in three congregations: in Beesd until 1867, in Utrecht until 1870 and in Amsterdam, the largest and most influential church in the Netherlands, until 1874 when he was elected as a member of the Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament.

Already while in Beesd his name became widely known throughout the land as journalist and speaker. Several of his writings calling for changes in church and school were soon published. Eagerly his services as minister were sought by the Utrecht congregation, then acknowledged by many as a citadel of Reformed orthodoxy. His inaugural sermon on *De menschwording Gods, het levensbeginsel der Kerk*⁹ demonstrates, however, that he had not yet freed himself completely from the influences of Schleiermacher and Hegel. His spirited defense of the Utrecht consistory on the issue of church visitation thrust him into the forefront of the struggle for church reformation. What the Reformed Church needed, were it once again to be a true church in ministering to the spiritual needs of the people, was liberation from the synodical organization of 1816.¹⁰ It was wreaking havoc throughout the land. Meanwhile he saw the inconsistencies of the Ethical school which compromised the absolute authority of Holy Scripture and the proper function of the creeds in the life of the congregations. This division in the ranks of the professedly orthodox grieved him deeply. Yet for him any compromise on this basic issue was impossible. Above all else God's truth had to triumph, if both church and nation were to prosper.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that within three years Kuyper accepted the call to Amsterdam. Here was a strong

minority of committed Reformed members in both consistory and congregation. Here the struggle for church reformation would be crowned with a measure of success.

While in Utrecht he involved himself also in the political struggle against the do-nothing liberalism which had for decades prevailed. At this time he met Groen van Prinsterer whose antirevolutionary principles had won but little support. Within a month Kuyper joined the group, little realizing that soon he would be thrust into a position of leadership for many who saw the urgency of applying Christian principles to political life. In 1872 he began and assumed editorship of *De Standaard*, a daily newspaper which explained, defended and promoted antirevolutionary views as these applied to all of life. From time to time also his sermons were published to win a wide reading public. Scholarly research, which always captivated him, was not neglected.¹¹ When attacks were levelled against the actions of several Reformed elders, he defended them against the boards with arguments which could not be defused. He exposed the dangers of the growing modernism in the churches in his *Het Modernisme, een Fata Morgana op christelijk gebied*. His chief concern, however, was instructing believers in the right understanding of Scripture. This led to producing and publishing several volumes entitled *Uit het Woord*.¹² Every week a supplement, entitled *De Heraut*, was included with the daily newspaper to draw attention to the life of the churches. For it he always prepared a meditation as well as lead articles on Christian doctrine.

For years Kuyper had steeped himself in Calvin studies. This led to a deeper appreciation of that reformer's influence on the course of European and especially Dutch history. This subject was addressed in his *Het Calvinisme, oorsprong en waarborg onzer constitutionele vrijheden*.¹³ Like Groen van Prinsterer before him he saw in the spirit of the French Revolution the chief enemy not only of the gospel and the churches but also of all true liberty for the people.

Soon the call came to involve himself directly in Dutch politics. In a by-election the Gouda constituency elected him as its representative to the Second Chamber. Receiving

honorable emerituation as minister of the Amsterdam congregation (while retaining the office of ruling elder) he was sworn in as member of parliament early in 1874. Three issues demanded the attention of the government at that time: public education, colonial administration, and social conditions in the land. The liberal majority, content with the status quo, offered only a few palliatives to soothe an increasingly restless people.¹⁴ Every issue was thoroughly studied by him in the light of both the Dutch constitution and prevailing conditions. On all these he appealed to what he hoped and believed was still left of a Christian conscience among the legislators. For this he was ridiculed and hated. Repeatedly his proposals, well-grounded and formulated, were rejected out of hand. Often he and his few supporters felt themselves powerless in a lions' den. Unwisely he drove himself beyond the point of endurance. Only complete rest in some foreign country offered hope for recovery. To obtain the needed funds, he sold his home and with his family left for Switzerland. The fifteen months in that invigorating climate he spoke of as "the year of my exile."

Upon his return he resigned his seat in parliament. With this, however, his years of greatest accomplishments began to dawn. Much time and effort were spent in organizing political allies throughout the country. For them he prepared *Ons Program*,¹⁵ setting forth the principles and platform of the Antirevolutionary Party.

Meanwhile reformation within the Reformed Church was the chief goal for which he lived and labored. Again and again he demonstrated how the ecclesiastical boards tolerated "the lie" in the congregations. Although positively Christian schools, free from domination by a so-called neutral government, sprang up in many cities and towns, the universities at which ministers were educated remained entirely in the hands of the liberals. Together with influential friends he laid the foundations for a university free from direct control by either church or state. In the face of bitter criticism the Free University was opened in 1880 with three professors and five students.¹⁶ The opening address on *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring*,¹⁷ soon recognized by many as a masterpiece

delineating a Christian view of education, church and state, was delivered by Kuyper himself who now began his career as theological professor.

Tensions within the established church proliferated. One issue after another had been decided by classical and synodical boards contrary to Scripture, the creeds and the church order. These decisions dismayed an ever-growing number of Reformed believers. Consistories and church members became directly involved. But how could the congregations be liberated without taking revolutionary action? Once again Kuyper showed the way in his well-documented *Tractaat van de reformatie der Kerken*¹⁸ published in connection with the 400th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther.

Three years later several consistories speaking for their congregations went in "doleantie,"¹⁹ including that of Amsterdam, five of whose pastors and seventy of whose elders and deacons (a majority at the time) had been threatened with deposition by the official boards.

This movement swept throughout the land, taking with it more than two hundred churches and some 200,000 members.²⁰ Once again, as earlier in 1834, police were called in to harrass the Reformed constituency and dispossess them of the ecclesiastical properties which were legally theirs.

For decades many in the Dutch Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk*), which had seceded from the Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) fifty years earlier, viewed with growing interest and appreciation what Kuyper and his supporters were doing for the revival of the Reformed faith and the reformation of spiritual and ecclesiastical life within the old organization. By this time that group numbered nearly 300 congregations with some 200,000 members.²¹ Both groups were wholeheartedly committed to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Cooperation in the fields of education and politics had been carried on for some time. But could these churches unite in an ecclesiastical federation? After lengthy debates and discussions, also on the level of their respective synodical assemblies, the union was effected in 1892. Once again a large

share of the leadership was provided by Kuyper.

Meanwhile articles, pamphlets and sizeable volumes of his writings poured from the presses. The editorship of both *De Standaard* and *De Heraut* remained in his hands. Repeatedly he addressed convocations of the Free University, political rallies, organizations for Christian education and youth groups. All of these evidenced amazing erudition which baffled his friends and astounded his foes. How could one man, having no more than twenty-four hours each day, accomplish so much with such great effectiveness? Scrupulously he scheduled his time, devoting specific hours to family and friends while taking his annual vacations outside of the Netherlands where no one could disturb him. But always he acknowledged that his strength was found only in God who nourished his life with Scripture and prayer.

After serving as theological professor with distinction²² Kuyper again entered the political arena. In 1894 he was elected to represent the Sliedrecht district. By this time some of his earlier friends had turned away from his leadership. Already in 1886 Hoedemaker who had rendered valuable services in establishing and teaching at the Free University forsook him. In the early 1890s the Antirevolutionary Party suffered severe losses when Kuyper and de Savornin Lohmann, an intimate friend, differed radically on the question of extending voting rights to the Dutch citizens. Although Kuyper was deeply disappointed, he steadfastly and at times even stubbornly maintained his own position.

An interlude was afforded by his trip to the United States in 1898. At Princeton he delivered five lectures on *Calvinism* as the most consistently biblical and systematic view of life and the world. Here he was awarded a doctorate in law in recognition also of his contributions in the field of theoretical and practical statecraft. During this brief period of a few months he conversed with President McKinley and other national leaders; he addressed learned societies; he visited universities and colleges; he spoke to large gatherings in cities where many Dutch immigrants had settled. While not oblivious to many failings in American society, he spoke highly of its form of government which guaranteed far

greater freedoms than did most European nations.

Upon his return he found himself again embroiled in politics. Tensions in South Africa occupied much of his attention. But more immediately pressing problems at home had to be addressed. In the ongoing struggle for social reform and equal rights for non-state (Roman Catholic as well Reformed) schools he assumed an influential role. Finally in 1901, as a result of elections which gave a majority to parties of the Right, Kuyper became prime-minister with a coalition ministry. Now the Christian voice was clearly heard and often followed in political decisions. This honor was his until 1905.

His life, however, was not spared deep personal sorrow.

Always his family had supplied him with joy and courage to continue his work. He esteemed his wife highly as a loving and wise companion. Five sons and three daughters were born to them. Family discussions and devotions were held every day without exception. Vacations were frequently a time of growing delight in each other's company. But in 1892 tragedy struck when one son passed away unexpectedly. And in 1899 Mrs. Kuyper died of a severe illness in Switzerland, to end a happy marriage of thirty-six years. Now much of the sunshine which had brightened his life was dimmed by this loss. Soon thereafter he penned a series of meditations entitled *In Jezus ontslapen*.²³

But his work was far from finished.

In the churches and their assemblies his voice was heard often and with respect. He continued to rally those who followed his political program. He met dignitaries from various lands. He conferred with Her Majesty the Queen on various issues confronting the government. His influence on the Free University, now enjoying a steady growth, continued without interruption. His short and long articles in *De Standaard* were read with rapt attention even by his detractors. Several of his most important works were published and won for him increasing acclaim.

At almost sixty-four years of age Kuyper, after the elections of 1901, assumed the position of prime minister. The war in South Africa between the British and the Boers was still raging. By May 31, 1902, not without some influence by the Dutch government, the Peace of Vereeniging was signed. The following year the country was plagued by a railway strike. Under socialistic and anarchistic leaders it threatened to paralyze the entire nation. As prime minister Kuyper proposed three bills which after heated discussions were passed into law by both Chambers. For this, while restoring order so that never again was the country to know another railway strike, he was bitterly hated by the opposition. His struggle for reform in education especially on the higher level, which he considered his greatest achievement, was painful. It led to the dismissal of the First Chamber, which so infuriated his liberal foes that in the elections of the next year his coalition ministry fell from power.

With this political change he retired to private life.

The next year was spent in traveling to many countries around the Mediterranean and Black Seas, fulfilling a desire which he had cherished for decades. Two volumes, *Om de oude Weereldzee*,²⁴ were penned by him describing not simply his travels but analyzing and evaluating social, political and religious developments in those several lands which at that time were threatening the peace of the entire continent.

The remaining years of his life found him most frequently at his desk. From there he continued to instruct the common folk in the Reformed faith by his many writings. Although by some of the younger men his leadership of the Antirevolutionary Party was resented, he remained for the majority "the grand old man." Both *De Standaard* and *De Heraut* remained under his control, himself spending hours every day to correct proofs before the materials were printed. Until after his eightieth birthday his mind remained clear and vigorous, his health despite a serious illness relatively good. But death was now claiming one friend after another to cast deep shadows across his declining years.

By the summer of 1920 it became apparent that his days were numbered. He continued to write as long as some measure of physical and mental strength remained. With reluctance he surrendered his editorship of *De Standaard* in 1919 but continued to write his weekly meditations for *De Heraut*. The last was written on August 29, 1920, based on Jeremiah 5:1. Because he always worked well ahead of schedule, it did not appear until a few days after his demise.

Slowly but surely his strength ebbed. By the end of September he no longer appeared at the dinner table to lead family devotions. Lovingly he was cared for at home by his oldest daughter. Toward the end only his immediate family and his closest friend, Idenburg, were allowed in the sick-room. On Monday, November 9, Kuyper fell peacefully asleep in the Lord Jesus whom he had loved so long and served so well.

* * *

Anyone reflecting on the career of this man finds it difficult to draw up the balance-sheet.

Undeniably he was great, a leader endowed with amazing qualities of mind and will and heart. Small wonder that he was at times called "Abraham the mighty!" Someone has shrewdly remarked that true greatness grows. In Kuyper's life this was abundantly evident. Rullman in a lengthy article has summed this up succinctly:

Dr. Kuyper was a miracle-man. Charles Bossevain in 1897 called him "an opponent with ten heads and a hundred arms." Likely it will be impossible to explain the secret of this amazing personality. This lies hidden in Christ, who was his life, without whom he could do nothing but through whom he accomplished all that he did.²⁵

Throughout his busy life he always towered above the crowd. He was not simply a man suited to that season; he was, despite some glaring faults, one in whom thousands reposed confidence. His voice touched his hearers' hearts while it engaged in informing their minds, stirring their wills to action and giving them the vision of claiming all of

life for Christ the King. When some sneered that he made of these people marionettes, himself holding in his hands all the strings to make them leap and dance to his tune, his laconic reply was, "Try it yourself then, with our Calvinists, if you can make them into marionettes."

The secret of his sustained leadership should be clear to anyone who takes time to read his writings in the light of the times in which he lived. So strong were his convictions akin to those which they cherished, so persuasive his explanations and argumentations, so clear and concise his directives for reformation according to the Scriptures that for decades these people felt safe and secure under his leadership. For too long had they been despised by those who in large measure ordered the life of church, society and state in the Netherlands. He raised his voice for that freedom which was theirs in Christ. With many colleagues and coworkers he drew them together. He led them out of that impotence which had caused them for so long a time to live in cultural isolation.

When Kuyper, and shortly thereafter Bavinck, passed from the earthly scene, people of strong Reformed convictions worshipped in congregations no longer subject to hierarchical control. They sent their children to Christian schools on all educational levels with government recognition and financial support. He supported them in their struggle for economic advancement. He was among the first to raise Reformed theology to a scholarly level. For all that and much more--never forgetting the 2600 heart-searching meditations which flowed regularly from his pen--he deserves to be remembered even now.

Nor did his contributions die with his death.

For ten to twenty years longer Kuyper (and Bavinck) were highly esteemed in the Reformed world. Lacunae in theological studies, to which he had repeatedly called attention, were filled. Excellent commentaries, both for scholars and common folk, were published with regularity, as well as scholarly materials in other areas.

Soon after 1920, however, a spiritual malaise began to infiltrate life in the Reformed churches. A few attempted to follow him slavishly, even to the point of driving his convictions to conclusions of which he would hardly have approved. These efforts at "repristination" against which he had often warned were fatally flawed. They produced only sterility. The piety and passion which characterized many Reformed people in his day began to give way to a smug and self-satisfied respectability. And shortly after World War II life in those churches which he helped nourish and nurture repudiated nearly everything for which he had stood. Every distinctive which had made the Reformed a force to be reckoned with was compromised. Kuyper's legacy fell into disrepute in those churches which had come under new leadership in journalism, education and politics. The infallible authority of the Bible as the only and sufficient norm for faith and practice, the strength and song of his followers as well as of himself, was bartered away for the latest intellectual and theological novelties. Faithful attendance at divine worship, once the outstanding hallmark of those churches, dropped alarmingly especially in the cities. Recently each year also registers a loss in total membership. Today those churches, both pastors and people, are succumbing to that spiritual lethargy and doctrinal indifferentism which characterized a majority in the old Reformed Church of the 1860s and 1870s.²⁶

On this note, however, we would not end our reflections.

By some in other Reformed constituencies Kuyper's work is still respected with appreciation. This is especially true of the "liberated" who were forced out of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands during the 1940s. More than ten years earlier Klaas Schilder exposed some of the inconsistencies in Kuyper's theological constructions while building firmly on the foundations which he had laid. Those who follow his lead still can be seen walking "in Kuyper's line."

Nor has his influence been negligible across the seas, chiefly in the United States and Canada.

Early an effort was made to establish a daily paper after the fashion of *De Standaard*. This proved abortive. Somewhat more successful, at least for a season, were attempts to make an impact on the political order and to organize labor associations on Christian principles. But no leader of Kuyper's stature arose to give the much needed direction. Too little did his kingdom-vision challenge the minds and stir the hearts of those who were professedly Reformed. Far too many were content to rest in cultural isolation with their families, schools and churches, together with homes for the aged and several institutions of Christian mercy. More recently another effort is being made in Canada to establish a Reformed political party. The ideal of claiming all of life for Christ is not entirely forgotten. But lest it perish in our generation, it must be preached from the pulpits, taught in our schools and expounded in depth with practical directives in our several journals. Such witness, when springing from God who alone gives life and liberty, will not be put to shame.

We look not for another Abraham Kuyper. The sovereign God does not duplicate men any more than he does events. But studying this man's contribution with scrupulous attention can provide fruitful insights for challenging the spirits of our unbelieving and ungodly age.

Reformed believers keep no register of saints. Nor do they erect shrines to honor, often with tongue in cheek, those who lived long ago.

Rather, with a profound awareness of God's grace in Christ Jesus they listen to what Scripture requires of them:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

In that spirit of praising the Savior-King we honor Kuyper who fought valiantly for his claims according to Scripture and to the glory of the triune God.

NOTES

1. For Kuyper's life and work the following can be consulted: Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (St. Catharines, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1978); W.F.A. Winckel, *Leven en Arbeid van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1919); H. H. Kuyper, *Gedenkboek ter herinnering aan het overlijden van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921); H. H. and J. H. Kuyper, *De levensavond van Dr. A. Kuyper* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1921). Especially valuable for research are the three volumes of J. H. Rullman, *Kuyper-Bibliographie*, vol. 1, covering the years 1860-1879 appeared in 1923, vol. 2 from 1879-1890 in 1929, and finally vol. 3 from 1890-1932 in 1940.
2. At one time the Netherlands boasted five universities: at Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen, Franeker and Harderwyk. By Kuyper's day the last two had been dissolved. All were under state control, each with its own approach to Scripture, theology and the church. For years no Reformed scholar was ever seriously considered for a professorship.
3. For the divergent religious and theological trends in the Reformed Church at that time, cf. P. Y. De Jong, "1886--a Year to Remember" in MJT Vol. 1 (Spring 1986) 13-18.
4. Kuyper, *Confidentie*, quoted by Vanden Berg, 17.
5. This study was submitted in Latin under the title *Inter se conferantur Calvini et Johannis a Lasco sententiae de Ecclesia; exponatur quomodo ex utriusque Reformatoris historia et ingenio sint ortae et cum reliqua utriusque doctrina cohaereant; ad Evangelii normam diiudicentur*. By prescribing this subject the Groningen professors, who had little respect for Calvin, hoped to support their claim that the Reformed faith as it came to expression in the Netherlands drew largely if not almost exclusively from sources other than Calvin. Their use of history in teaching theology and preparing men for the

ministry was far from their professed objectivity as even the modernist Scholten pointed out.

6. Kuyper had planned to write a definitive biography of John a Lasco, the Polish reformer. His time cut short by illness, he requested and received permission to build on materials found in his treatise. In the introduction he pledged himself to prepare a new and complete annotated edition of a Lasco's works. This he accomplished during his first pastorate. The two volumes, now exceedingly rare, appeared in 1866.
7. In *Confidetie*, quoted by Vanden Berg, 17.
8. The first pamphlet dealt with the question whether ministers were to be chosen by church members or by consistories. It appeared in 1867 under the title *Wat moeten wij doen, het stemrecht aan onszelven houden of den kerkeraad machtigen?*
9. "The Incarnation of God, life-principle of the church" was published in 1867 as his inaugural sermon. Throughout his career many of his sermons appeared in print. In them we can trace his spiritual and theological development. They deserve more attention than they have received to this time.
10. Within a very short time several writings on church reform came from his pen: *Kerkvisitatie te Utrecht in 1868; Toelichting der Memorie, ingediend door den Algemeenen Kerkeraad van Utrecht, aan het Classicaal Bestuur; Verzameling van officieele bescheiden, inzake de kerkvisitatie te Utrecht*, all in 1868 and one year later *De Kerkelijke Goederen* as well as *De werking van Artikel 23* which dealt again with the congregation's right to choose its pastor.
11. His work as scholar was evidenced in such works as *Kerkeraads-Protocollen der Hollandsche gemeente te Londen, 1569-1571* and *De Hollandsche Gemeente te Londen in 1570-1571*, both in 1870.
12. This series, which appeared over a period of several years, was sub-titled "Edifying Bible Studies." The

first in 1873 dealt with God's self-revelation in Scripture. The second in 1875 dealt with (among other subjects) with the keys of the kingdom, divine election and the man Christ Jesus. Later volumes included studies on the doctrine of the covenant (1884), on God's grace as particular, that is, restricted to the elect (1884), and on the practice of godliness (1886).

13. "Calvinism, source and guarantee of our constitutional liberties," which was soon translated into English.
14. By this time many in the Netherlands, dissatisfied with liberal leadership, began to espouse the cause of Marxian socialism. In many provinces, notably North Holland and Friesland, this found favor and led people to break with the Reformed Church which had done nothing in the way of urging economic and social reform.
15. "Our Program," a sizeable volume of nearly 1300 pages, dealt with all the basic issues and problems facing the state in the light of the Bible.
16. Kuyper's defense of the right of a society, free from state and ecclesiastical control, to establish a university is delineated at some length in Rullmann, 2:16-28.
17. "Sovereignty each in its own sphere."
18. "Treatise on the reformation of the churches."
19. The term "Doleantie" derives from the Latin *dolere*, giving expression to the sorrow of those who mourned the sad conditions in the Reformed Church and confessed that for too long they had acquiesced in these.
20. On this movement cf. P. Y. De Jong, "1886--a Year to Remember" in MJT Vol.1 (Spring 1986) 7-52.
21. On the Secession of 1834 cf. P. Y. De Jong and N. D. Kloosterman, editors, *The Reformation of 1834: Essays in commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return* (Orange City, Ia.: Pluim Publishing, 1984).
22. Not until 1901 did Kuyper receive "leave of absence" from his professorship at the Free University. His

successor in the chair of dogmatics was the erudite Herman Bavinck who for some twenty years had taught at the Theological School of the erstwhile Christian Reformed Church at Kampen. Kuyper never wrote a systematic theology, although student notes were published in five volumes under the title *Dictaten-Dogmatiek*. His most significant contribution in theology was his *Encyclopedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid* in three volumes. This and the reception which it received, both favorable and unfavorable, is noted by Rullmann, 2:64-86. Other important works of his are *E Voto dordraceno* on the Heidelberg Catechism (1892-1895) in five volumes; *Van het Kerkelijk Ambt* (1898); *De Engelen Gods* (1902); *De Gemeene Gratie* (1902-1905) in three volumes. Noteworthy are also the contributions made late in life. *Onze Eeredienst* (1911), *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus* (1912) in three volumes. *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde* (1916-1917) and *Van de Voleinding* in four volumes were published after some editing by his son in 1929.

23. "Asleep in Jesus."
24. "Around the ancient world-sea."
25. Rullmann in *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925) 3:541.
26. Like much of western Europe the Netherlands manifests an astounding secularization of life. The Roman Catholic Church, with many nominal members, claims somewhat over 6,000,000 adherents. The old Reformed Church which does have a strong group loyal to Scripture and the confessions has suffered the most severe losses. The other Reformed churches, some of them very small, total less than a million and a quarter members, approximately eight percent of the total population. Cf. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, David B. Barrett, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 511, 513.