

WISDOM & WONDER

COMMON GRACE IN SCIENCE & ART,

A NEW & COMPLETE UPDATE OF ABRAHAM KUYPER.

By Abraham Kuyper & Jordan J. Ballor (Editor), Stephen J. Grabill (Editor),
Nelson D. Kloosterman (Translator), Vincent E. Bacote (Introduction), Gabe Lyons
(Foreword), Jon Tyson (Foreword), (2100)
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Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) wrote and taught prodigiously. This small volume is an updated and complete translation of two sections that were inadvertently omitted from Kuyper's three-volume work on common grace. Kuyper wrote extensively about common grace, "... that gracious operation of God, after the fall, that permits man and civilizations to develop, when according to his justice, he had every reason to end the world." (Dr. John Barber, Cornerstone Presbyterian Church).

After Kuyper finished divinity school and his doctorate, he first pastored a small Reformed Church in Beesd, Netherlands. Impressed by the sanctity and orthodoxy of his congregation, he began writing sermons and other works calling the church to turn away from its modernist apostasy and reform itself. A brilliant orator and preacher, Kuyper eventually led the Reformed church in Amsterdam, where his church consisted of 140,000 members, and ultimately was instrumental in the neo-Calvinist revival in the Netherlands. In 1888 he formed a coalition that gained power, ended the era of Liberal rule and in 1889 introduced the first state subsidies for parochial schools. He went on to conclude his active ministry so that he could enter politics and ultimately served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 until 1905. He was clearly a man driven to bring his faith in God into the public square, a lesson to every Christian in America today.

Although Kuyper's ministerial work led to the reform of the Dutch church, his writing is relevant to business and American culture today because Kuyper confronted a church that had lost its way in much the same way that mainline Protestant churches (especially Anglican) are alleged to have done today. Dutch society, particularly its

universities, had fallen under the influence of the modernists, who instilled an "anything goes" mentality, and downgraded the role of Christians in academic and public life.

If Kuyper were alive in America today he would be writing for the Acton Institute or a similar organization decrying the decoupling of reason from faith in the academy and in the public square. The Netherlands of his time had a state-sponsored and supported church, a concept alien to American culture unless we realize that the Federal government, as well as some state and local governments, are so secular that people of faith who choose to proclaim the Gospel face extraordinary challenges. Kuyper worked to reintegrate into public discourse the conviction that Christian faith is both for salvation and for the rest of life.

He reminds readers touchingly and tellingly in the section on Beauty that absolutely anything can be used either to glorify God or lead to sin. Speaking about *misuse* as opposed to *lawful use* he contrasts Jesus to John the Baptizer:

John the Baptizer was an ascetic. He lived in the desert, was clothed with animal skins, ate grasshoppers and honey, and withdrew from ordinary activities of the world. By contrast, Jesus sat down at feasts, attended a wedding, ate fine foods, drank wine, and used money that friends gave him. His demeanor was so fashionable that the clothes stripped from him before he was hung on the cross were thought desirable enough to divide among the soldiers who performed the execution on Golgatha.

Kuyper reminds us that beauty arose “...from the pleasure of God, having been intentionally willed by God and having been called into existence by his almighty power.”

Overall, Kuyper’s words underpin the role of God in a just society, and in every other human endeavor. He believed and preached that both wisdom and wonder are gifts of God and that men of faith must work to bring their moral convictions to public life, whether in art, education, business or politics and to take an active role in public life.

Taken alone, I believe this is too scholarly a treatise to be used simply as a text in a college business course, particularly at the undergraduate level. It needs context. Happily, there is a companion website established by the publisher, oncallinculture.com that provides excellent context, but reference to the website and the context are missing from the book. Reviews printed in the first pages inside the cover quote Charles Colson (Founder, Prison Fellowship and Colson Center for Christian Worldview) and Richard J. Muow (Fuller Theological Seminary)

among many others, including professors of theology, history and philosophy, all of whom presumably are profoundly aware of Kuyper’s work. Students and professors in secular colleges and universities who seek to incorporate Biblical teachings in their work and businesses will benefit greatly from a careful introduction of Abraham Kuyper beyond this particular text.

The similarities between problems many people of faith experience in America today and those in the Netherlands 100 years ago are well addressed by Kuyper’s exhortations and careful reasoning, and his words resonated with me, particularly after I did some research to find out more about this brilliant and saintly man from another time and place.

I heartily recommend this book to inform scholarly debate and a reasoned discussion of the role of Christianity in public and academic life, but caution that I am sure I am not alone in needing background and context in order to help me to connect Kuyper’s fine preaching to my life 100 years after his and a continent away.