

preaching and sacraments (ch. 10). The Assembly recognized that both the preached (audible) word and the sacramental (visible) word must be received by faith.

Two chapters on preaching: “Christ-Centered Sermons” (ch. 11) and “Christ-Centered Exegesis” (ch. 12) are especially important. Preaching the Scriptures and preaching Christ were complementary to the Assembly, with Christ being the center of both preaching and biblical interpretation. Anthony Burgess said, “It’s the main end and scope of the Scriptures only to exalt Christ, and the end of the Ministry should be the same with the end of the Scriptures” (145). In the end, said the Scots commissioner Edward Reynolds, every minister should “preach Christ Jesus” (161).

Van Dixhoorn concludes that the Assembly could have done better in treating unmotivated and incompetent candidates, perhaps seeking to institute “prophesyings,” to aid ministers. But the Assembly did “communicate a vision for ministry” that lasted in Presbyterian and Congregational communions in Scotland, Ireland, and the North American colonies (177). The Assembly’s Directories were well received in these places.

This fine study reminds us that much we take for granted today about church and ministry and preaching was fully discussed and debated in the Assembly. Today, we continue to receive the insights of its dedicated work.

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Abraham Kuyper. *Common Grace: God's Gift for a Fallen World*. Volume 1: The Historical Section. Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas. Collected Works in Public Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015.

“God’s redemption is as wide and high and deep as the expanse of his creation.” Statements like this one by J. K. A. Smith on the cover of this new translation of Abraham Kuyper’s *Common Grace* are supposed to be supported by what is in between the covers. And yet they are not. To be fair, Kuyper himself was also given to grand pronouncements. Nevertheless, upon reading this book, one wonders if there might be a fissure between Kuyper and the Kuyperians.

With Kuyper, we encounter a creative and serious thinker who addressed himself not mainly to the intelligentsia, but through newspaper articles to a popular audience. Moreover, he does not condescend; he aims to elevate and educate his readers and make them better theologians. Both in content

and form, therefore, this is an attempt to bring Calvinist theology into rapport with the times. The current volume is part of a larger collection of Kuyper's translated works published by the Acton Institute, Kuyper College, and the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society. The entire series will be twelve volumes, including volumes on education, ecclesiology, Islam, and works like *Our Program*, the political manifesto of Kuyper's AntiRevolutionary Party. I am very pleased to see the appearance of this collection, not only because—full disclosure—I introduced and co-edited the volume on ecclesiology, but mainly because Kuyper is an outstanding example of confessional Protestantism struggling to answer questions raised by modernity, yet without losing its soul.

For exactly this reason, this book is worth a look even by non-Kuyper devotees. It is the work of more than one man; it is about a tradition finding its way. This is apparent if we pause to notice that the doctrine of common grace gained attention in the nineteenth century. Until then, the notion existed but had never been explored. Kuyper's *Common Grace* answered the age-old question facing Augustinians: How can pagans and sinners, weighed down by original sin and depravity, produce so much apparent good? But it also responded to the optimism and faith in humanity that we have come to associate with the nineteenth century—two apparently opposing forces. Kuyper withdrew from many of the established cultural institutions, like the Dutch *volkskerk* and the state universities, precisely when European culture seemed to have reached its zenith. People said that he was an Anabaptist, yet he was not. He had some explaining to do.

Kuyper's answer was typically Reformed and typically modern. Common grace makes “the nobler development of what was hidden in our human race possible” (347). This statement (there are many more like it) says more than a passing glance suggests. First, Kuyper was not interested merely in the good society or the intrinsic good of creation. He was interested in *development* and progress, and progress was especially the achievement of the Christian West.

In our nineteenth century in every arena of life the power of man over nature, the knowledge of situations, the means of community, the enjoyments of life, and so much more, have advanced so incomparably further from the preceding century. ... [P]recisely this development would have been inconceivable apart from common grace. (547–48)

Second, the possibilities of progress are latent in creation. Nature is something to be worked on. The good in it has to be brought out. It is a kind of neutral form with which to work. Finally, these latent possibilities in

creation must be brought out by human ingenuity. The basis of culture, according to Kuyper, is not the leisurely contemplation of the goodness and beauty of creation. It is about active, human engagement and improvement: work. Common grace brought the Protestant work ethic into the era of steam engines and telegraphs, inventors and colonial governors.

Theologically, *Common Grace* is timely because a great confidence in culture making has reemerged—surprisingly, perhaps—after a century whose main cultural achievements have been in the field of brutal, destructive power and banal entertainment. Alistair MacIntyre, Rod Dreher, and Charles Chaput call for a new Benedict, but a number of Protestant voices are reasserting the old confidence in humanity. These include the likes of Tim Keller, N. T. Wright, and Richard Mouw, who introduces this volume. In these discussions, Kuyper is often close at hand. In his introduction Mouw writes, “[Kuyper] was convinced that the works of culture would be gathered into the holy city when it descends from the heavens as the new Jerusalem” (xxviii). This is where the discussion becomes interesting. In this new translation, Kuyper says just the opposite; human civilization will be destroyed by fire, not purified:

One day there will be an unspeakable catastrophe that will consume the entire cosmos, and along with it there will be an immense change in the arrangement of sun, moon, and stars. Not a single human writing, not a single work of art, will transfer from the existing situation into the new one. (544)

Kuyper’s position is more nuanced than we realized. For example, he distinguished between nature and culture. Human nature will be perfected and resurrected, but the artifacts of culture will not. The future life will be unmistakably embodied, but the continuity between this life and the next will be at the level of organic essence, not cultural forms. Further, the development that especially interests Kuyper, as to what will carry over into the new life, is not so much cultural artifacts but personal, spiritual development—that is, growth in godliness.

Whose side is Kuyper on after all? Have we misread him? Is postmillennialism making a comeback, and more vigorous than before? And does Kuyper have anything to say about it? This volume is a welcome resource, but it raises more questions than it answers. That is not all bad.

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