



## **TRIANGULATING THE FOUNDATIONS OF KUYPERIAN SPIRITUALITY**

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### **Abstrak**

Spiritualitas adalah sebuah topik yang kurang berkembang dari kajian terkait Abraham Kuyper, mungkin dikarenakan penekanan kuat Kuyper terhadap implikasi-implikasi publik dari iman Kristen. Akan tetapi, tidak semestinya spiritualitas diabaikan karena Kuyper juga memiliki penekanan yang sama kuat terhadap pentingnya dimensi privat dari iman Kristen. Selama lebih dari empat puluh tahun, Kuyper telah menulis berjilid-jilid volume terkait meditasi yang jumlahnya mencapai 2,200. Di dalam tulisan meditasi-meditasi itulah tergambar jelas kepribadian dan spiritualitasnya. Artikel ini berargumentasi bahwa tulisan meditasi-meditasi yang ditulis Kuyper adalah titik berangkat yang cocok untuk mengkonstruksi sebuah spiritualitas Kuyperian bersama-sama dengan tema-tema Kuyperian lain, seperti doktrin tentang palingenesis dan eklesiologi. Istilah “palingenesis” (dari bahasa Yunani palingenesia) merujuk kepada kelahiran baru personal dan kelahiran baru seluruh kosmos. Doktrin ini menjembatani implikasi-implikasi privat dan publik dari iman Kristen, antara spiritualitas dan praktik-praktik kristiani dalam teologi Kuyper. Dan kendati pembedaan Kuyper terkait Gereja sebagai institusi dan organisme sudah dikenal luas, penekanannya terhadap peran institusi Gereja sebagai ibu yang merawat spiritualitas umat beriman masih kurang dikenal. Penelaahan yang lebih mendalam akan menunjukkan bagaimana pandangan Kuyper tentang eklesiologi ternyata memainkan peran sentral dalam spiritualitas.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** spiritualitas Kuyperian, spiritualitas Reformed, Abraham Kuyper, meditasi-meditasi Kuyper, eklesiologi

### **Abstract**

Spirituality is an under-developed topic on Abraham Kuyper, perhaps it is due to Kuyper's strong emphasis on the public

implications of Christian faith. But things are not supposed to remain that way, since Kuyper also has an equally strong emphasis on the importance of the private dimension of Christian faith. For more than 40 years, Kuyper had written a multivolume of meditations which amount to 2,200. In those meditations, his personality and spirituality are clearly reflected. This article argues that his meditations would be a suitable starting point to construct a Kuyperian spirituality alongside other Kuyperian themes such as his doctrine of regeneration (palingenesis) and his ecclesiology. The term “palingenesis” (from Greek word palingenesia) refers to both personal rebirth and the rebirth of all cosmos. This doctrine bridges the private and public implications of Christian faith, between spirituality and Christian actions in Kuyper’s theology. And while his distinction between the Church as institution and as organism is well-known, his emphasis on the role of the institutional Church as mother which nurtures the spirituality of the believers is lesser known. A deeper examination shows how his ecclesiology plays a central role in his spirituality.

**Keywords:** Kuyperian spirituality, Reformed spirituality, Abraham Kuyper, Kuyper’s meditations, ecclesiology

### Introduction

The recent interest on Abraham Kuyper has not abated. Unfortunately, recent scholarship on him has focused too much on his intellectual achievements, such as his theological and political works, including how genius were his organizational skills, helping to develop the Netherlands into a more democratic society. In James De Jong’s words, Kuyper scholarship, “has focused almost exclusively on his mind and virtually ignored his spirituality—his heart and soul.”<sup>1</sup> The situation was very different in Kuyper’s lifetime. When he was actively writing, he sometimes paused from producing some writing projects and columns, but he never let

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<sup>1</sup> James A. De Jong, “The Heart and Soul of Abraham Kuyper: Reflections on His Meditations,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2017): 40. Hans Boersma provides a similar observation, noting that “Kuyper’s broader spiritual theology has also not yet been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation,” aside his understanding of beatific vision. See Hans Boersma, “Blessing and Glory: Abraham Kuyper on the Beatific Vision,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2017): 207 fn. 9. Kuyper’s works on public theology have been translated into 12 English volumes by Lexham Press. However, a complete translation of his meditations or works related to spirituality has not been initiated yet; see <https://lexhampress.com/product/55067/abraham-kuyper-collected-works-in-public-theology>.

anything interrupt him from writing his weekly meditations.<sup>2</sup> While the majority of his followers did not have enough capacity to handle his “academic and sophisticated publications,” his meditations had nourished their spirituality and were widely known because many of them subscribed to *De Heraut* (The Herald), the weekly religious newspaper Kuyper established and edited from December 1877 to November 1920, the time of his death.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for several reasons, De Jong proposes that his meditations would be the best start to develop a Kuyperian spirituality. As De Jong writes, “One can legitimately say that his meditations reflected the heart and soul of Abraham Kuyper like none of his theological writing did.”<sup>4</sup>

I agree with De Jong that Kuyper’s meditations play a vital role as a starting point to develop the theme of Kuyperian spirituality. However, it seems that there are other Kuyperian themes that might also serve well as foundations to develop his neglected spirituality. In his *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, Craig Bartholomew argues that Kuyper’s notion of palingenesis serves as the key to understanding the Kuyperian tradition.<sup>5</sup> For Bartholomew, this notion is comparable to Herman Bavinck’s imitation of Christ due to its ability to hold together “deep and christocentric spirituality” with “cultural engagement.”<sup>6</sup>

Another theme that might also serve well as a foundation of Kuyperian spirituality is his ecclesiology. While other works on Kuyper tend to neglect his spirituality, De Jong notes that there are two works by James Bratt on Kuyper that take his spirituality into account. In Bratt’s biography of Kuyper, he profiles Kuyper’s spirituality several times and also notes the importance of his meditations. And in Bratt’s earlier collection of Kuyper’s translated works, published to commemorate the centennial of Kuyper’s Stone Lectures at Princeton, two of Kuyper’s meditations were reprinted.<sup>7</sup> However, in those works, Bratt does not just highlight Kuyper’s meditations but also his ecclesiology to deal with his spirituality. In the first work, he highlights how Kuyper’s ecclesiology is related to his spirituality. Bratt points out how Kuyper viewed the Church as the mother who nurtures the

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<sup>2</sup> De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. The expression “heart and soul” in De Jong’s article refers to Kuyper’s spirituality; see the direct quotation from footnote 2.

<sup>5</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>7</sup> De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 41; cf. James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 107, 128-129, 177-178, 281-284, 314-319, 323-334, 362, 375; and James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), sidebars on 148-153 and 408-415.

spirituality of the believers, and how he expounded the marks of the church in his *Confidentie* (1873), a work that serves as his famous spiritual autobiography.<sup>8</sup> And in the latter work, he includes five of Kuyper's writings related to church and theology.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Kuyper's ecclesiology should be regarded as important as his meditations to understand his spirituality.

Given that context, I shall argue that there are three themes that might be suitable foundations to construct a Kuyperian spirituality: his meditations, his notion of palingenesis, and his ecclesiology. These three foundations would give us a big picture of Kuyper's spirituality and also enable us to know him better as a person. Toward that goal, this article will deal with those Kuyperian themes sequentially then conclude.

### Kuyper's Meditations

Kuyper was a prolific composer of meditations. Tjitze Kuipers states that Kuyper had produced twenty-two hundred meditations for more than forty years. The earliest appeared in the Sunday edition of *De Standaard*, a daily Christian newspaper started by Kuyper in April 1872 and which he edited for the rest of his career. This newspaper was designed for the sake of the Anti-Revolutionary Party political movement from which he emerged to be their acknowledged leader. The Sunday edition later came as the *Zondagsblad* (the Sunday paper) which contained his earliest weekly meditations. From December 1877 until his death in November 1920, *De Herant*, which was a separate religious weekly newspaper also edited by Kuyper himself replaced *Zondagsblad* in publishing his meditations. Regarding these published meditations, Kuipers calculation is that 616 were reprinted in ten volumes as eight different collections between 1880 to 1908.<sup>10</sup> Given this output, De Jong aptly states that Kuyper's meditations reflect aspects of spirituality—his “heart” and “soul”—more so than his other writings.

Kuyper's meditations are very personal. He reflected not just upon his career, but also his family, his loved ones. For example, Kuyper's *In de schaduw des doods*, a volume consists of fifty devotionals from *De Herant*, came shortly after Kuyper lost his ten-year-old son Levinus in 1892. This contains “astute pastoral

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<sup>8</sup> Bratt, *Modern Calvinist*, 175-178.

<sup>9</sup> Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, vii-viii.

<sup>10</sup> De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 46-47; cf. Tjitze Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 66-68, 117. Rullmann lists eleven series of Kuyper's meditations in J. C. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliographie*, 3 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, N.V., 1923-1940), 2:34-38. According to De Jong, the discrepancy between eight and eleven is because Kuipers' classification system places three series of meditations in the category of biblical-theological articles rather than in the category of meditations. De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 48.

materials” with reflection from Kuyper’s personal struggle.<sup>11</sup> He did it as well in his *In Jezus ontslapen* which contains fifty-two devotionals on death and dying, which first appeared in *De Heraut* in 1899-1900.<sup>12</sup> This collection reflects Kuyper’s emotions regarding his wife’s health problem and her death. Kuyper meditated on 2 Corinthians 5:4, entitled “When What Is Mortal Is Swallowed Up by Life,” which was published on September 3, 1899, eight days after his wife’s death.<sup>13</sup> These meditations exhibit, “sensitive, unique, pastorally helpful comments and insights.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, J. C. Rullmann’s comment on Kuyper’s meditations is apt: “Frequently they reflected what preoccupied him, what gripped him; who he really was appears in these meditations.”<sup>15</sup>

Besides reflecting his personality, Kuyper’s meditations reflect his spirituality. After receiving positive feedback from his readers, in meditation number 2,000 in *De Heraut*, Kuyper reflected on the practice of meditation. According to him, when meditating,<sup>16</sup>

you withdraw from your usual thought pattern and pull back into what is holy. You do not shut yourself off entirely from the world, but you are not so suddenly distracted by the daily realities that might impinge on you either. In your meditation you definitely do not cut yourself off from the world, but the world becomes secondary, while what’s primary in meditating is living into the realities of fellowship with the Eternal Being. In meditating, the soul silences the world in order to listen only for what God is saying to it.

While vocation is active, meditation is passive. However, this is not a complete passivity for meditating means actively waiting for God to speak in silence. Thus, Kuyper aptly described the activity of meditation as an “engaged passivity.” When we meditate, we engage in a mystical, deep spiritual communion with God that is sparked by our reflection on the Bible. That explains why Kuyper liked to use the expression of hidden, secret or private communion

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<sup>11</sup> De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 50; cf. English translation: Abraham Kuyper, *In the Shadow of Death: Meditations for the Sick-room and at the Death-bed*, trans., John Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1928).

<sup>12</sup> English translation: Abraham Kuyper, *Asleep in Jesus: Meditations*, trans., John Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1929).

<sup>13</sup> This originally published in *De Heraut*, No. 1132; cf. Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 408-415.

<sup>14</sup> De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 52.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 39; cf. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliographie*, 3:34.

<sup>16</sup> Translated and cited in De Jong, “The Heart and Soul,” 39; cf. Rullmann, *Kuyper-Bibliographie*, 3:34.

(Dutch: *verborgen omgang*) to describe the discipline of meditation.<sup>17</sup> In sum, all of his meditations reflect both an intimate relationship with God and the man's own personal struggles.

Kuyper's *Honig uit den Rotssteen* (*Honey from the Rock*, 2 vols) is the first published collection of his meditations. Volume one was written from 1877 to 1880, and volume two first appeared in *De Heraut* between May 1879 and the middle of 1882. The title comes from Psalm 81:16 even though Kuyper never wrote any meditation on that verse.<sup>18</sup> The translation of this work to English has been done by De Jong.<sup>19</sup> However, among all collections of Kuyper's meditations, his *Nabij God te zijn* (*To Be Near unto God*) remains to be the most read and widely known materials in English, perhaps because it was written during Kuyper's most politically prominent years.<sup>20</sup> This contains two volumes, and these meditations were originally written for *De Heraut* while he served as prime minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905) and during his tour in the Mediterranean countries from 1905 to 1906. It first appeared as two volumes in 1908 and has been reprinted many times and circulated widely. It has been translated to English by three different publishers with almost the same translation, but Schaap's edition of the collection has significantly condensed it and provides a linguistically updated form.<sup>21</sup> That this collection continues to be reprinted over the decades points to how it still sparks interest among contemporary and emerging readers.

In his doctoral dissertation, Brant Himes elaborates on Kuyper's political situation that influenced him in writing *To Be Near unto God*. After Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and the religious coalition won the 1901 elections, Queen Wilhelmina summoned Kuyper, the elected prime minister, to the palace charging him to form a cabinet. Kuyper had difficulty to secure talented colleagues who wanted to fill the posts. Alexander de Savornin Lohman declined his offer to be the ministry of Domestic Affairs as did Aeneas Mackay, the previous ARP prime minister. Theo Heemskerk, perhaps due to his brash personality, also refused the offer. Kuyper felt the slow progress of his politics; his lack of formal training in law made him rely on others, when working out the legal technicalities of his thoughts. Amid that "heat and pressure of leading the government," Kuyper began to retreat

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<sup>17</sup> De Jong, "The Heart and Soul," 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Honey from the Rock: Daily Devotions from Young Kuyper*, trans., James A. De Jong (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> De Jong, "The Heart and Soul," 53.

<sup>21</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near unto God*, trans., John Hendrik De Vries (1918, 1925; repr., Vancouver: Regent College Publications, 2005); condensed into modernized English by James C. Schaap (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1997).

into the mystical side of life. Thus, this meditative work shows Kuyper's personal struggle as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands and as a Christian who seeks God in meditation.<sup>22</sup> As Kuyper wrote:<sup>23</sup>

The blessed peace, the hallowed rest, the childlike confidence which God's elect have always enjoyed, even in seasons of bitterest trial, is not the result of reasoning. It is not the effect of deliverance. It is solely and alone the sweet outcome of taking refuge in the secret place of the Most High, of abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, of knowing what it means, "To Be Near unto God," and of enjoying it.

This meditation reminds its readers that God's presence is protection from life's trials. Yet Himes asserts the importance to note that, "his hiding in the shadow of the Spirit's wings was not to be regarded as a retreat from the political situation. Rather, it was a spiritual foundation upon which Kuyper could find reassurance and take decisive political action."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the engagement with social, political, scientific, educational, and philosophical issues that burned in Kuyper's day is almost completely absent from his meditations, however, such an absence should not be seen as advocating a permanent flight from the world. As Kuyper writes, "To meditate was to disengage from these preoccupations of daily life in order to commune with God. Meditation on Scripture and time spent in prayer was necessary to replenish the soul for reengagement with daily vocation."<sup>25</sup> Bartholomew sees that the spirituality Kuyper emphasizes in his meditations resonates with the spirituality found in Elizabeth O'Connor's *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*.<sup>26</sup> The journey out into the world is only sustained by the journey inward through deep engagement with Scripture and with oneself.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Kuyper's meditation for June 7, 1903, entitled "If Any Man Will Do His Will," could present a clearer picture of the relationship between disengagement and reengagement with the world in Kuyper's spirituality. Through that meditation, Kuyper tried to connect the "knowledge of God" with the "will of God."

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<sup>22</sup> Brant Micah Himes, "For a Better Worldliness: The Theological Discipleship of Abraham Kuyper and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," Ph.D. dissertation (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2015), 131-132.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 138; cf. Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near unto God*, trans., J. H. De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Sevensma Publishers, 1918), 80.

<sup>24</sup> Himes, "For a Better Worldliness," 138.

<sup>25</sup> De Jong, "The Heart and Soul," 57.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Journey Inward, Journey Outward* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 316-317.

He wrote to his readers that Christian life is not just about knowing but also about obedience to God's specific call. Kuyper wrote: "God becomes known to us by studious thought, by play of the imagination, by inner experience and in other ways. But it cannot be denied that he also becomes known to us by the will."<sup>28</sup> That is why mere contemplation without action would not make a person a good Christian. Himes aptly concludes Kuyper's *To Be Near unto God* as: "A matter of spiritual meditation for the purpose and ability of Christian action; and, in this dynamic of being with God and acting in obedience to God, the disciple treasured the intimate peace and presence of the knowledge of God."<sup>29</sup>

### Palingenesis

Kuyper's notion of palingenesis significantly shapes spirituality in the Kuyperian tradition. Palingenesis bridges the private and public implications of the Christian faith, or to recall Bartholomew's words, it could hold together "deep christocentric spirituality" with "cultural engagement."<sup>30</sup> To understand the significance of palingenesis to the formation of Kuyper's spirituality, we will attempt to look closer at the original context of palingenesis and his personal experience of palingenesis, which is the story of his conversion to Calvinism.

According to Kuipers, the concept of palingenesis is first introduced by Kuyper in his *The Blurring of the Boundaries*,<sup>31</sup> a speech by Kuyper addressing the change of rectorship at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on October 20, 1892. It was common at that time for such ceremonies to include a speech by the outgoing rector concerning issues about the institution, major questions in their discipline, or general public concerns. Kuyper used that chance to address the rise of pantheism in nineteenth-century European culture. He was firm in his position to halt the antithesis and to totally avoid the synthesis toward pantheism. He insisted that palingenesis should be the antithesis of pantheism.<sup>32</sup> Pantheism had blurred the boundaries, first, the boundary between God and the world, and consequently, all other boundaries.<sup>33</sup> As a response to that, he called his hearers to live out a life-sphere under the foundation of palingenesis. He deliberately drew that term from the Greek word *palingenesia*. That word simply means rebirth or regeneration, and in the Scripture, it refers to both personal rebirth (Tit. 3:5) and the rebirth of all creation, as fulfilled in the

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Himes, "For a Better Worldliness," 139-140; cf. Kuyper, *To Be Near unto God*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> Himes, "For a Better Worldliness," 143.

<sup>30</sup> Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 318.

<sup>31</sup> Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 363-364.

<sup>33</sup> Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 24.

new heaven and new earth (Matt. 19:28). Because sin has spoiled the will, misdirects people's minds, and also darkens their intellect, only those who are regenerated would be able to live out a worldview capable of standing against pantheism.<sup>34</sup>

Kuyper's proposal was for his hearers to follow the example of Abraham's calling and how Christ called the twelve disciples apart to accompany his public ministry. For Kuyper, those who have faith should begin to draw a boundary among believers, so that they could grow in maturity and get ready for the struggle to come.<sup>35</sup> Here, Kuyper's position also reflects a spirituality that has the motif of the journey inward and journey outward, for he proposed not a permanent separation, but a temporary separation to reengage. In Bartholomew's words, "This is withdrawal for mission, not withdrawal for the sake of withdrawal."<sup>36</sup> To summarize, a life defined by palingenesis entails the renewal of a believer's life, first and foremost; yet palingenesis does not end there. Together, believers become a renewed people of God who seek to renew the world through Christian mission.

Secondly, it is crucial to see how the notion of palingenesis is closely related to his own conversion experience. He did not arrive at that notion through mere theological abstraction, but he experienced it through the change of his own heart.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps what he experienced in the village of Beesd is the main factor that shaped his understanding of the notion. While he pastored there, he met Pietje Baltus. And around fifty years after that meeting, he published a tribute for her death in *De Standaard* (March 30, 1914), where he explained how he was captured by her decisiveness. At first, Baltus did not want to meet Kuyper nor hear him preach. She refused to attend the church in Beesd as she refused to receive half-baked preachers to her house. The reason was that Kuyper was leaning toward the ethical wing of the church which tended to be anti-Reformed,<sup>38</sup> while she insisted on the full confession of the faith as possessed by the martyrs. Yet the meeting that changed Kuyper's conviction eventually happened. Through that meeting, Kuyper grasped the power of the absolute that lived in this woman and broke with all of his half-heartedness. The effect of that meeting was so significant as he concluded: "One child of God,

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<sup>34</sup> Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 398.

<sup>35</sup> Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> The discussion on Kuyper's conversion and how it relates to his notion of palingenesis could be found in *Ibid.*, 13-34.

<sup>38</sup> The emerging Ethical school in Dutch Reformed theology tried to pose a moderate alternative between the reductions done by the Modernist and the strict Confessionalism. The label reflects their emphasis of the existential decisions of believers' conscience to the Christian message. The Ethical theologians give Christian experience priority over doctrine. Bratt, *Modern Calvinist*, 45-46.

however insignificant by the world's standards, can be like the morning star, again bringing radiance into the night of the church's life."<sup>39</sup> That experience led Kuyper to be closer to the Canons of Dordt and John Calvin. This experience corresponds to Kuyper's understanding of the inner rebirth or palingenesis that does not refer to a mere emotional experience of the heart but includes a change in one's worldview. According to Jeremy Ive, "It is a religious re-orientation of humanity in a cosmic context."<sup>40</sup> In his teaching on regeneration, Kuyper equates the implanted "faith-faculty" by God in the regenerated person with the "new principle of life."<sup>41</sup> And for Kuyper personally, that religious re-orientation or the new life principle refers to Calvinism. As he said, "In Calvinism my heart has found rest."<sup>42</sup> However, it is important to note why Kuyper's Calvinism is called neo-Calvinism. The main reason is that he did not attempt to merely imitate Calvinism of the past. He used Calvinism as a foundation to build the worldview that might be relevant to modern life, thus, able to answer the demands of the future.<sup>43</sup> As Jacob Klapwijk writes:<sup>44</sup>

Thus by "Calvinism" Kuyper means to express not just a theological position, a confessional stance or a special type of ecclesiastical polity, but a dynamic vision that already in the days of the Reformation brought about all kinds of transformations in society, first of all in Calvin's Geneva and subsequently also among the Huguenots in France, the Reformed in Holland, and the Puritans and Presbyterians in England and Scotland. It is a view that the Pilgrim Fathers took to the New World and that led, even there, to political, cultural, and societal renewals.

Kuyper did not mean to be different from Calvin in principle, yet his emphasis lies on the impact that Calvinism brings to societal transformation, especially to the modern society of his time. Neo-Calvinists express the sentiments that the majesty of God is

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<sup>39</sup> Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 58-59.

<sup>40</sup> Jeremy Ive, "A Critically Comparative Kuyperian Analysis and a Trinitarian, 'Perichoretic' Reconstruction of the Reformational Philosophies of Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd," Ph.D. dissertation (King's College, 2012), 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Concise Works of the Holy Spirit* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers: 2009), 311.

<sup>42</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931), 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>44</sup> Jacob Klapwijk, "Abraham Kuyper on Science, Theology and University," *Philosophia Reformata*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (2013), 19.

expanding to all creation, for nothing is outside his glory.<sup>45</sup> As Herman Bavinck writes in the spirit of palingenesis: “The rebirth by water and Spirit finds its completion in the rebirth of all things (Matt. 19:28). Spiritual redemption from sin is only fully completed in bodily redemption at the end of time. Christ is a complete savior.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, Kuyper’s notion of palingenesis reflects a spirituality with balanced emphases on the journey inward and the journey outward. While his call to halt the antithesis against pantheism and his personal conversion experience show how his spirituality starts with the journey inward, the neo-Calvinistic movement that he started to seek societal transformation reflects the journey out into the world.

### Kuyper’s Ecclesiology

In overview, Kuyper’s ecclesiology distinguishes the Church as institution, as organism, and as visible organism. His ecclesiology plays an important role in his life, considering his first and last work before his death is about the Church. While palingenesis may be considered the key to the Kuyperian tradition as a whole, it is the concept of ecclesiology that functions as the core of Kuyper’s theology. And his conception of the Church as organism plays a very important role in understanding his ecclesiology.<sup>47</sup> It is unfortunate that Daniel Strange views Kuyper’s understanding of the Church as organism, “was increasingly given prominence at the expense of the institute.”<sup>48</sup> Strange correctly outlines that Kuyper’s primary expositions regarding the institute/organism distinction are found in his *Rooted and Grounded* (1870) and in his *De Gemeene Gratie* (Common Grace), a series published in *De Heraut* in 1902-4.<sup>49</sup> However, Strange does not look into the earlier Kuyper who strongly expresses his high view of the institutional Church. Kuyper’s understanding of the Church as mother that nurtures the spirituality of the believers lies within that

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<sup>45</sup> Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 128.

<sup>46</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed., John Bolt, trans., John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), 4:694.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1974): 149-150. In Kuyper’s earlier thought, the church as organism refers to the invisible church, that is, the organic unity between all the elect through the work of the Holy Spirit with Christ as the head of the church. Kuyper later developed the notion of the church as visible organism—a point that will be elaborated below. See Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 150.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Strange, “Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between Church as Institute and Church as Organism and Its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology,” *Themelios*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2015): 431.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

period. And from that time on, the whole development of Kuyper's ecclesiology shows how he eagerly fought for the spiritual purity of the institutional Church. I will start by briefly tracing the development of Kuyper's ecclesiology, and then attempt to see the relationship between his ecclesiology and spirituality.

Before writing *Rooted and Grounded* (1870), Kuyper as a young theological student and a pastor wrestled with the question regarding the nature of the Church.<sup>50</sup> At first, he accepted Dutch modernists' position which followed Richard Rothe's position, that the Church has "outlived its usefulness." Then as a graduate student, his *Commentatio* (1860) compared the ecclesiology of John Calvin and the Polish reformer John á Lasco. The result was that Kuyper accepted the Church as an organic society, not as institution. Institutional form of the church may remain only under suspicion. The Church is merely the society of Christians who gather, and Calvin was wrong to ascribe a "magical" power to the sacraments.<sup>51</sup>

Later on, his view concerning the institutional church had significantly changed. One of the most noticeable experiences that affected him was the rediscovery of Calvin's teaching while he pastored at Beesd. Kuyper believed that Calvinistic teaching could survive even at a small village like Beesd because Calvin had established a church which through its firm organization, had brought blessing and peace to the people in all European nations and over the sea, in both cities and villages, even to the poor and those accounted as nothing. Kuyper rediscovered a beautiful image of the Church as mother of the believers from Calvin. It filled him with passion for the reformation of the Church of his time, so she could really be a mother;<sup>52</sup> whose womb bears us, whose breast

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<sup>50</sup> The Netherlands Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, hereafter abbreviated as NHK) was considered as the national church or *volkskerk* on that time. It is not a state church since it was not the only church sanctioned by the state; Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran, and Remonstrant churches were tolerated and even received some state support. However, the NHK was considered as the national church for it was combined under a single administrative unit under national synod by King William I in 1816, and its worship was overseen by the governmental department of public worship. State universities were authorized to conduct theological education for the prospective ministers in the national church. And all of its pastors, including Abraham Kuyper, were often paid by the state. And due to the close relationship between the NHK to the state, "A break with the national Church was a matter of national security, especially after the separation of Belgium, with its Roman Catholic majority, from the Dutch federation." John Halsey Wood Jr., "Going Dutch in the Modern Age: Abraham Kuyper's Struggle for a Free Church in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 64, No.3 (2013): 517-518.

<sup>51</sup> Wood, "Going Dutch in the Modern Age," 518-519.

<sup>52</sup> Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," 164, see also 164 fn. 41.

nourishes us, and whose tender care leads us toward the endpoint of our faith.<sup>53</sup> The Church is not just a gathered society but a divinely ordained institution commissioned to bless and nurture the spirituality of her members.

The Church is both “mother of believers” and a “divine institution.” The Church is a means of grace that has a hidden side, Christ’s mystical body that is inseparable from its visible form. One could only come into contact with the mystical body through this visible church. This mystical communion with God reveals more than just the efficacy of grace in the life of an *individual* Christian, because Kuyper believed that God’s grace operates through the institutional nature of a visible, *communitarian* church. His high view on the institutional church made him take up the question regarding the Church’s nature with such fervor when his contemporaries regarded it as a mere administrative issue. For Kuyper, the Church-question was about nothing less than God’s honor and the salvation of the souls.<sup>54</sup>

Kuyper saw the spiritual lethargy of the NHK, and so as an attempt to reform the spiritual purity of the national church, he proposed his Free Church ecclesiology.<sup>55</sup> This concept shows his concern for the spiritual vitality of the Church members with his new commitment to the institutional Church, by offering the formulation of the Church as organism and institution. This borrows from Paul’s metaphor of the Church as “rooted” and “grounded” in love (Eph. 3:17). “Rooted” describes the inner, spiritual, and organic aspect of the Church, which requires freedom, while “grounded” describes the external and institutional forms of the Church. Kuyper’s own metaphor regarded the Church as a river. The organism could no more be the Church without the institution just like a river could not be a river without the banks that formed all its rushing water.<sup>56</sup> When the Bible uses images such as the temple or a house or a “pillar and buttress” to refer to the

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<sup>53</sup> Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 520; cf. Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 60; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed., John T. McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 4.1.4: 1016.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 521.

<sup>55</sup> Simply understood, “The Free Church severed the Church’s link with the state, the nation, hierarchy and, finally, with grace .... They held to the Reformed Free Church out of conviction rather than convention. The divine was no longer located in the institution but strictly in the believers themselves.” Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 531-532. Readers should be aware to not simply equate Kuyper’s Free Church with independent, Free Churches in other parts of the world. While the term “Free Church” could simply point to a more congregationalist polity (*inter alia*), the Free Church in Kuyper’s thought stands in clear opposition to the national church. In other words, whereas in other contexts the opposition might be against synodical hierarchy, Kuyper’s Free Church stands primarily in opposition to the political control of the state.

<sup>56</sup> Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 520.

church, it is talking about the “grounded” institutional church.<sup>57</sup> And it uses organic imageries such as mustard seed, vine branches, yeast, and the body of Christ to talk about the Church as organism.<sup>58</sup>

For Kuyper, the Church should be free from government interference, for the church institute was the organization of a divinely created organism.<sup>59</sup> That understanding made him nationally infamous, especially after he argued in his *What Should We Do?* (1867), that laypeople should be allowed to vote for their own church officers which were usually selected by the board of elders and deacons. Kuyper’s doctrine of organism supported a democratic polity, for the Spirit who indwelled the organism empowered them to select their own leaders. Kuyper did not stop there; he regarded the national church (*volkskerk*) or the State Church as the chief failure of the Reformation. While Calvin still permitted the connection between the Church and State under separate institutions, Kuyper rejected all such connections. He wanted to abolish Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, which describes the magistrate’s task to protect the sacred ministry by preventing idolatry and false worship. He also deemed the synod of the national church as the creation of King William I, thus, it was an imposition to the Church made by the state. In exchange for that, he proposed a system of independent local congregations. Kuyper also argued that the state’s ongoing subsidies had caused laziness and lethargy among the pews.<sup>60</sup>

The conflict between Kuyper with the national church eventually culminated in his deposition in 1886. In January 1887, Kuyper convened a national church conference in Amsterdam to

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Matthew Banks, “An Analysis of Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between the Church as Institute and the Church as Organism,” Th.M. thesis (Oak Hill College, 2013), 25; cf. Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, trans., Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press, 2013), 14-15.

<sup>58</sup> Banks, “An Analysis of Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between the Church as Institute and the Church as Organism,” 27.

<sup>59</sup> Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 173-174.

<sup>60</sup> Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 522-523; this position should not be seen as promoting a two-kingdoms theology. Theologian David VanDrunen, a proponent of a two-kingdom perspective, suggests that there are similarities to two-kingdoms thought, namely in how Kuyper separated church and state as respectively sovereign spheres as well as how he aligned the church with *special* grace and the state with *common* grace. However, Kuyper’s emphasis that the two graces belong to one kingdom of God—by which means should any holistic societal transformation be achieved—comprises the main difference between Kuyper’s position and a two-kingdoms doctrine. See David VanDrunen, “Two Kingdoms and Reformed Christianity: Why Recovering an Old Paradigm is Historically Sound, Biblically Grounded, and Practically Useful,” *Pro Rege*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2012): 34.

inaugurate a new denomination where all delegates had to agree in writing that “throwing off the yoke of Synodical Hierarchy was a duty for every person who would honor the kingship of Jesus in His Church.”<sup>61</sup> However, Kuyper’s attempt was not so successful, since barely 150 out of the total 1,350 congregations of the national church followed the *Doleantie*.<sup>62</sup>

In 1896, when Kuyper was almost sixty years old, his young break-away church had just joined with the Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*), another confessional Reformed Church that had seceded from the national church some decades earlier. Altogether, their combined forces were still a minority to the Dutch society. By that time, he might have solved the problem with the national church through his Free Church, yet he faced a new problem. John Halsey Wood explains how Kuyper solved the problem by making the public church private, whereas his new problem at the time was how to make the private church public.<sup>63</sup> While Churches such as the New Church in Amsterdam could immediately be a concrete and visible symbol of the public presence of the Church, Kuyper’s Free Church model made it privatized and circumscribed. That position required him to explain how Christianity could be public, while the Church was not.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, as an attempt to answer that question, he developed the doctrine of the Church as visible organism which refers to individual Christians who live in the broader society.

While the national Church maintained a direct public role for the institutional Church, Kuyper’s institutional Church had a narrow religious role. According to Kuyper, the visible organic Church had the responsibility to engage in various spheres of life such as politics, education, commerce, etc. In practice, this public work took shape in myriad para-church organizations that Kuyper had established.<sup>65</sup> The institutional church was to remain within its own sphere and was to be increasingly seen as solely an institute for the ministry of the word, whereas the battle outside the sphere of the Church should not be fought by the institutional church, but through the visible organic Church.<sup>66</sup>

Kuyper’s main intention was not to diminish the power of the institutional Church, instead, he was mainly attempting to answer the question of how the Church could be influential to the

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<sup>61</sup> Bratt, *Modern Calvinist*, 160-161.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 162. Kuyper labeled such a church conflict as the *Doleantie*, refers to how the true believers are grieving for the usurpation of their mother church by illegitimate forces; *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 524, 527.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 528.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 529.

<sup>66</sup> Banks, “An Analysis of Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between the Church as Institute and the Church as Organism,” 29; cf. Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 178.

society yet remained pure. As Kuyper said, “there is a concentration of religious light and life in the [institutional church], but ... in the walls of this church there are wide open windows, and through these spacious windows the light of the Eternal has to radiate over the whole world.”<sup>67</sup> This relationship is depicted in the picture of a city set on a hill that shines its light out to the area below (Matt. 5:14-16). The world should not climb to the city nor the city descends to the world. The institutional Church and the world remain as two distinct and separate entities, but the Church should shine her light into the world.<sup>68</sup>

The motif of the journey inward and journey outward of Kuyper’s spirituality is also salient here. While the journey inward could be seen in Kuyper’s notion of the institutional Church as mother who nurtures the believers, the journey outward could be seen by how the organic Church should manifest her light and power into the world. As he said, “Only where that Church as institute stands pure again, can she also act as organism, again shining light, enlivening, preserving.”<sup>69</sup> The gathering of the institutional church marks the place where God’s abundant grace is poured out, by which means the spiritual life of the church and its members might be strengthened and their communion with God might develop more deeply. When church members return to their daily lives, they do not cease to be God’s church; rather, they act as the visible church-as-organism that extends God’s grace to the broader society.

### Conclusion

Kuyper’s spirituality is as fertile as his other works, and to neglect his spirituality—his heart and soul—would be unconscionable. As elaborated above, among other Kuyperian themes, his meditations, his notion of palingenesis, and his ecclesiology serve well as foundations to develop a Kuyperian spirituality. Throughout those three Kuyperian themes, Kuyper’s spirituality shows a salient motif of the journey inward and journey outward. He has an equal emphasis between political activeness and meditations, the inner renewal of God’s people and the renewal of the whole society, and spiritual purity of the institutional church, and the transforming influence of the visible organic Church. A Kuyperian spirituality always begins with coming to the presence of God (journey inward), so our strength will be

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<sup>67</sup> Cited in Banks, “An Analysis of Abraham Kuyper’s Distinction between the Church as Institute and the Church as Organism,” 28-29; cf. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 53.

<sup>68</sup> Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 200.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Wood, “Going Dutch in the Modern Age,” 528-529; cf. Abraham Kuyper, *De zegen des beeren over onze kerken* (J. A. Wormser: Amsterdam, 1896), 22.

replenished to reengage better with the world (journey outward). I wish that more works on Kuyperian spirituality would emerge in the future to present a more balanced view between his intellect and his spirituality, and I sincerely hope that this article would be an aid toward the production of such works.

### About the Author

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