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Who was Abraham Kuyper?
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Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch Reformed theologian, pastor, journalist, author, seminary professor, and statesman who lived and served in the Netherlands from 1837 to 1920. Kuyper was a renaissance man of his time, responsible for invaluable contributions in the ecclesiastical realm and the civil realm. He was home-schooled in a faithful Christian family. He was a faithful husband and the father of eight beloved children. He ministered during a large spike in the popularity of odious challenges to the traditional formulations of biblical inerrancy and infallibility. A man deeply rooted in the Word of God, Kuyper believed that this Word was the voice of all authority; this drove him to apply it to the ecclesiastical and political debates of his day.

Kuyper is famous for saying, “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'” For Kuyper, this meant that the Word of God gave the Christian and the Church a comprehensive worldview. He believed with his whole heart that this sacred Word truly applied to every area of life. It was not limited to use inside the church as an institution.

Kuyper pastored for many years, beginning with his first call in the town of Beesd in the year 1863. In 1886, he spearheaded a movement to free the faithful from the national ecclesiastical structure which had been in place for centuries. He and others began to see the State Church as a compromised institution spiraling away from Christ and the true Gospel.

One of the catalysts for the inception of his untethered federation of churches was the insistence that Kuyper and others placed on confessional subscription for Dutch ministers and professing members alike (The Three Forms of Unity). Kuyper and his colleagues saw this as a non-negotiable and called for wide repentance in this area. In response to this holy push, the State Church suspended him from office in 1885, along with many other ministers. After a synodical appeal failed, hundreds of thousands of Dutch Reformed Christians saw the writing on the wall and followed Abraham Kuyper into the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands). He worked tirelessly to unite with other federations of churches who had seceded from the State Church in the past.

Kuyper’s passion for faithfulness to the Reformed Confessions and his firm stand against liberal nominalism led to his work in post-secondary education. He was duty-bound to train the next generation of ministers to submit themselves to the authority of Scripture and not to the whims of the nominal state religion.

The Lord had plans for Abraham Kuyper outside “the four walls” of the church. He found himself increasingly pulled into the political sphere to represent his cause, and he served in that capacity, holding various offices as a representative of *the anti-revolutionary party* from 1875 until his death, notably serving as the nation’s Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905. He believed that the French Revolution was a plague on Western Civilization and a major player in much of the decline of the faithfulness of its churches.¹

¹ With one voice, our churches heartily affirm that our namesake’s views on *apartheid* were on the wrong side of history; but we do not name our presbyteries after elect angels.

During his time as Prime Minister, he worked zealously to advance the agendas of all orthodox Christian institutions. Although he believed in protecting the rights of secular counterparts, as well as Roman Catholic groups who he viewed as co-belligerents, he openly and prophetically denounced secularism as a non-neutral, religious thought system which would eventually infect and destroy the nation's moral foundation. When the Senate would not pass a law granting equal status to Christian universities, Kuyper worked to dissolve that Senate and form a new one that would eventually help pass his legislation.

Rev. Kuyper's doctrine of *sphere sovereignty* is perhaps the most compelling reason to name a Presbytery after him. This is the "belief that God had organized the creation into discrete theaters of activity."² Although there are several spheres, including education, business, and economics, the three main spheres are the *Church*, the *State*, and the *Family*. In Kuyper's teaching, the spheres were to "remain mutually autonomous and freely developing, to the flourishing of humanity and the glory of God."³ Each sphere was given specific purposes by the creator, revealed as such in Scripture, and each possesses its own integrity.⁴ Each sphere is directly informed by the Word of God, not requiring mediation from any other. Because he believed that the family was the foundation of a true society, and because churches were made up of individual families, his work always helped move the national conversation toward healthier checks and balances. This idea is highly influential in our communion of churches today. It is a concept that needs recovery in 2023, especially in America, where it is a natural fit by political design.

When a culture sees family, church, and state as separate spheres of authority (not isolated from each other, but interdependent), abuses are preventable. When a culture collectively believes that God communicates His divine will to these spheres, even though they are connected as illustrated in a Venn diagram, that culture will grow and become strong, as each sphere complements and builds up the other two. In Kuyper's vision, the church should call the state to faithful governance, the state should protect the church, and both church and state should see to it that families prosper, all according to the same standard: The Holy Bible.

In this model, the myth of institutional neutrality is on display in broad daylight, while the state is regarded as a fallible institution (in line with all previous Calvinistic thought), thereby placing objective limitations on the reaches of its authority. Kuyper was instrumental in influencing generations of men, including those in our own churches, to continue in the belief that "public engagement [is] part of Calvinist orthodoxy, a direct consequence of that heartiest of Calvinist perennials, *the sovereignty of God*."⁵ Indeed, Kuyper and his followers have always championed the idea that true Calvinism demands public engagement. It is our passion in the CREC to respond to the same high calling of engaging the culture today.

² Bratt, James D. *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, x

³ *ibid*, 130

⁴ *ibid*, 379

⁵ *ibid*, xx