

## **ABRAHAM KUYPER (1837-1920)**

### **The Antithesis Theologian**

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Dutch Calvinism was dominated by the magisterial Abraham Kuyper, one of the major figures in his nation's history. His dynamic leadership attracted "the little people" (de kleine luyden). The antithesis principle was basic to his thought and work. According to Kuyper, neutrality is impossible. A commitment to Christ cannot be harmonized with a humanistic outlook on life. There exists a radical antithesis between those who do and those who do not live out of their obedience to Jesus Christ. Two kinds of people live side by side with each other, the children of light and the children of darkness. A sharp and deep division cuts through social and political life, the sciences and the arts, every sphere of life. Every system of thought has its departure in the human heart. How can there be neutrality in a world under the curse of sin, broken by it, in rebellion to God? Only the miracle of spiritual rebirth can bring change in the human heart. Through rebirth a man becomes a new creation in Jesus Christ. Through the work of the Holy Spirit he becomes a changed person; his mind is now enlightened by the Spirit of God so that he can understand His revelation. He has a new direction and a new outlook on life.

Because of the antithesis no facts are neutral. Everything must be interpreted through the eyes of faith. So the Christian sees the facts as God created, God-sustained and God glorifying.

Kuyper's antithesis teaching made a direct impact upon scientific enterprise. The Free University was established, free from state and church. Biblical insights would direct the pursuit of all knowledge. Does this mean that Christian scientists will all draw the same conclusions from their research and observation? Kuyper wrote,

Let one not think that Christian science, if we may so call the science which takes palingenesis (rebirth) as its point of departure, will all at once lead its investigations to entirely like and harmonious results. This is impossible, because with the regenerate also, the differences of subjective disposition, of manner of life, and of the age in which one lives, remain the same: and because Christian science would be no science, if it did not go through a process by which it advanced from less to more, and if it were not free in its investigation, with the exception of being bound by its point of departure.

What then is the antithesis? It is a conflict of faith and unbelief, between the Christian and non-Christian views of life. In any field of endeavour it is system against system, world-view against world-view. In 1899 Kuyper addressed the faculty of the Free University on evolution. He not only showed the incompatibility of the atheistic, materialistic, evolution view with the Christian faith, but also rebuked any compromise between the two camps. He strongly warned his fellow Christian scholars not to have anything to do with any form of evolution.

The antithesis principle works its way not only through the world but also through the church. The church may never surrender to the spirit of the age. She must be in continual opposition and clearly draw the lines of demarkation. Kuyper called Christians of Reformed persuasion to spiritual separation. If Christianity is to influence the world it must live out of its own distinctive principles. So Kuyper opposed the liberal spirit of his time. He spoke against the belief in the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

The lines were also drawn in the cultural, economic and political spheres. The antithesis was applied through Christian action. Over against the kingdom of the world the people of God organized themselves in their own unions or organizations. As a Christian politician Kuyper didn't promote a theocracy. He articulated a public tolerance founded on an explicitly Biblical covenantal basis.

Is Kuyper's thought still relevant today? In Holland. Kuyperianism has undergone a serious decline. In the U.S. and Canada there is a renewed interest in his works. Some of the most rigorous and provocative thought about the role of religion in public life and society is being done by Calvinists influenced by Kuyper. Especially in the current North American debate on politics and religion. Kuyper's principles can bring sense to the massive conflict of opinions.

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