

**An analysis of Abraham Kuyper's distinction between the
church as institute and the church as organism**

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

Kuyper's distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism, which has been called the "cornerstone" of his public theology, can be articulated clearly in just a few words:¹

*The distinction is basically between the body of Christ gathered around word and sacraments for worship and discipline and the body of Christ in the totality of its multidimensional vocation in the world.*²

Precisely because of its apparent simplicity it offers the promise of vast explanatory power when it comes to how to define the scope of evangelical involvement in the public square, and related, and perhaps more specifically, how to articulate the mission of the church. At the risk of caricature, there seem, of late, to be two camps forming within popular conservative evangelicalism over this issue. In one camp are writers like Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert. In their recent book *What is the Mission of the Church?* they argue that the *mission* of the church is evangelism and discipleship.³ They are cautious that the church's unique role will be lost if its mission is broadened to include cultural transformation. However they are insistent that they want Christians to be involved in a plethora of good works outside of the local church. DeYoung, at least writes from a "careful" Two Kingdoms position.⁴ Tim Keller is in the other camp. In his

¹ John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 248 Footnote 100.

² Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

³ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Illinois: Crossway, 2011).

⁴ Kevin DeYoung, "You Can Get There From Here," n.p. [cited 28 May 2013]. Online: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/12/22/you-can-get-there-from-here/>. As with most topics, generalisations are difficult, but for the purpose of this paper let us assume that the following description is somewhere approaching an accurate one. The Two Kingdoms model is most closely associated with Lutheranism. It places a strong emphasis on the goodness of creation and the sufficiency of common grace and natural revelation to provide the norms for a healthy society. However it insists that God's redemptive work is to be found solely within the church, which is governed, not by the norms of common grace, but by the gospel. Christians should work hard at their secular jobs but must realise that

recent book he is no less concerned to safe guard the mission of the local church by saying that “its main task is the ministry of the Word and the sacraments — winning people to faith and building them up as disciples.”⁵ However, coming from what he terms a Transformationist perspective he is keen to stress the need for Christians to be involved in all areas of life, shaping society and culture by living their lives, and doing their jobs, on the basis of an expressly Christian worldview, as revealed in scripture.⁶ For him, this too, is part of the mission of the church. Pertinent to our discussion is the fact that Keller suggests that Kuyper’s institute/organism distinction is a vital tool for holding the insights from the Transformationist and Two Kingdoms models together. He urges Christians to understand the mission of the church in both institutional *and* organic terms.⁷ The mission of the institutional church is ring-fenced as evangelism and discipleship, whilst the mission of the organic church is the broader task of cultural engagement and transformation which is effected by disciples living out Christ’s lordship in all areas of life.⁸

their *mission* is not to change the world. True kingdom work is only that of evangelism, discipleship and Christian community. Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: doing balanced, Gospel-centered ministry in your city* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 208-212.

⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 294.

⁶ Again a general description of the Transformationist position is difficult. Broadly, if, in a Two Kingdoms model, the locus of God’s redemptive work is most readily associated with the local church, in the Transformationist model it is wherever redeemed human beings are, in Christ, fulfilling the cultural mandate. Keller writes concerning this position that “since the lordship of Christ should be brought to bear on every area of life — economics and business, government and politics, literature and art, journalism and the media, science and law and education — Christians should be laboring to transform culture, to (literally) change the world.” Keller, *Center Church*, 195. (I am, of course, aware that in *Centre Church* Keller wisely argues for a “centre church” - a blend of insights from the Transformationist and Two Kingdoms models as well as from two others; Relevance and Counterculturalist (although in reality, these latter two approaches will collapse into either a Transformationist or a Two Kingdoms position when pushed.). He acknowledges that each pastor will have his own leaning in one of these directions. It is uncontroversial to say though, that Keller’s natural propensity is toward the Transformationist model.)

⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 248.

⁸ And in fact DeYoung/Gilbert also appeal to the distinction to suggest that there is a difference between the institutional church and the organic church. By the organic church they seem to mean Christians considered as “a bunch of individuals.” DeYoung and Gilbert, *The Mission of the Church*, 232.

Put like that it sounds very simple. However, could this apparent simplicity be deceiving? Is it possible to make such a neat distinction? If the distinction does not stand up to biblical and theological scrutiny then any explanative power it has will be a false economy at best, and may, at worst, be damaging. In this paper will ultimately conclude that there are serious problems with Kuyper's distinction.

Biographical details

Kuyper's career was one that spanned the institutional church and the organic. He stands out as a man who rose to positions of eminence in the church, in education, in the media, and in politics. Born in 1837 in Massluis Holland, one doctor or "quack" expressed amazement at the size of the young Kuyper's unusually large head.⁹ And as a youth he showed intellectual promise early.¹⁰ At the University of Leiden his doctrinal thesis was on the difference between Calvin's and à Laso's view of the church. At Leiden he was also influenced by the Romantic Theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. In 1862, the year in which he completed his doctorate, he was converted.¹¹ And in 1863 he began his career in the national church - the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*, (NHK)) – in which he served three pastorates.¹² It was in the third of these, in Amsterdam, that he reported finding rest for his soul as he fully embraced the Calvinist understanding of God's sovereignty.¹³ In 1874 he resigned from active ministry but still remained a member of the Amsterdam consistory.¹⁴ However, in 1892,

⁹ James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 3.

¹⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), i.

¹¹ There is debate about whether this is best seen as a genuine conversion or an "ethical conversion" that set the scene for a conversion of the heart in 1870. Bratt appears to take the former view, Bacote the latter. See Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, xxvii and Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49-50.

¹² In Beesd from 1863-67, in Utrecht from 1867-70 and Amsterdam from 1870-74. James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 9-11.

¹³ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 49-50.

¹⁴ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, xxvii.

after the so called *Doleantie* of 1886,¹⁵ Kuyper found himself suspended from his denomination. He and his followers then joined with the disestablished church, that had split from the NHK in 1834, to form together the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN)). Prior to this in 1872 he had assumed editorship of the daily newspaper *De Standaard* with its Sunday supplement *De Heraut*. These would be his “perennial pulpit and power base.”¹⁶ When he had left the ministry in 1874 it had been to take up a seat in parliament. In the late 1870’s he had helped crystallise the Antirevolutionary Party (ARP) which offered an alternative to the ideals of Modernism – a party which he would lead until his death in 1920.¹⁷ And from 1901-05 as head of this party he would serve the Netherlands as prime minister. Alongside this, in 1880, he also helped found the Free University, where he served as Professor of Theology, and the Christian School Association. Although he had read liberal theologians at Leiden and although in the 1870’s he had shown more than a passing interest in Robert Pearsall Smith’s Holiness movement, his settled mature theological framework was Reformed and Calvinistic. His “dominating principle was...in the widest sense cosmologically, *the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos*, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.”¹⁸ Today his influence lives on in the “neo-Calvinist” school of thought, which has considerable influence in both the Netherlands and the United States.¹⁹

Rationale for material studied and the structure of what follows

"[Kuyper’s] work was produced in the midst of many ideological, ecclesiological, and political battles. His primary aim was not to articulate a...systematic text, on a theology

¹⁵ This was a crisis precipitated by the orthodox in the Amsterdam consistory (or council) of the NHK in which Kuyper played a key role. Amidst growing concern about liberalism in the NHK, the orthodox in the council passed a statute which would assign buildings in their favour in the event of a schism. However upon doing this, they were suspended from office. These suspensions were upheld and those suspended found themselves “in Dolenatie,” that is, “in mourning.” Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 11.

¹⁶ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, xxvii.

¹⁷ Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 4.

¹⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 79. Author’s italics.

¹⁹ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 5.

of public engagement but to develop and present a theologically grounded approach to public engagement for the various challenges of his day.”²⁰ However, what he wrote in so doing – sermons, theological tracts, correspondence, political speeches, newspaper serialisations – is rightly called a “voluminous repertoire,”²¹ and much of it remains untranslated. In what follows we have tried to draw widely on the resources that are available in English. Moreover we have paid particular attention to his *Lectures on Calvinism*. First given in 1898, these are regarded as a summary of his thought.²² They are therefore somewhat of a “North Star” in navigating our way through what can appear to be a contradictory and ambiguous wider corpus. In any short study like this there is a tension between wanting to present as concise a picture as possible whilst also allowing Kuyper’s nuances and evolution of thought to come through.

After this introduction, the first chapter will be an explanation of Kuyper’s wider theological schema. In the second chapter we will describe the institute/organism distinction itself in some detail. The third chapter will be given to analysis. Our aim in this paper is to get beyond a simplistic definition and locate Kuyper’s distinction in his wider theology and historical setting. We will proceed on the premise that the better we can understand what Kuyper meant in his own context the better we will be able to critique his distinction. The main focus of this paper will be Kuyper and we will wait until the conclusion before we come back to the distinction in current usage.

²⁰ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 154-155.

²¹ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 9.

²² Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 9.

CHAPTER 1:

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Kuyper first articulated a distinction between the church as institution and the church as organism in 1870 in a sermon entitled *Geworteld en Gegrond* (Rooted and Grounded) – his inaugural sermon to the congregation in Amsterdam.¹ This is one of only two places where it is explicitly considered.² The other is in a three volume work entitled *De Gemeene Gratie* (Common Grace) published between 1902 and 1904.³ For something that was so central to his ecclesiastical and indeed political thought a detailed, sustained treatise on it is conspicuous by its absence in his writings. Moreover, and perhaps precisely because it never received a systematic treatment, Kuyper’s discussion of the distinction is not entirely consistent or without ambiguity.⁴ Certainly Kuyper’s focus was initially on the church as institute and then shifted to the church as organism.⁵ Both the initial focus, and the later shift coincided with his wider ecclesiastic and political goals. However, in order to properly understand what Kuyper meant by the terms “institute” and “organism” we need first to orientate ourselves within Kuyper’s expansive view of reality, to acquaint ourselves with his belief that each sphere of life was to be governed directly by divine ordinances without the mediation of either church or state and to understand that when Kuyper looked at the world he saw nothing happen that was not directly attributable to God’s sovereignty. We will look in turn at what is often termed “sphere sovereignty,” then at the distinction Kuyper made between special and common grace, before seeking to understand his view of human progress and eschatology.

¹ Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 248, 427 and Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 10.

² Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

³ Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 166, 187, 193-195. His writings on the subject before being collated in *De Gemeene Gratie* had previously been published for the common man in *De Heraut*.

⁴ Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

⁵ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 172-173.

1. Sphere sovereignty

Could we permit a banner that we carried off from Golgotha to fall into enemy hands so long as the most extreme measures had not been tried, so long as one arrow was left unspent, so long as there remained in this inheritance one bodyguard – no matter how small – of those who were crowned by Golgotha? To that question....a “By God, Never!” has resounded in our soul.⁶

With such a rousing charge Kuyper ended his address at the opening of the Free University in 1880. This was a university in which there would be no “pact of neutrality with learning that proceeds from another principle.”⁷ It was to be a university founded upon and proceeding from the thoroughly Christian worldview that “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!’”⁸ Having founded the ARP the previous year Kuyper was under no illusions about how little assent would be given to such a view in the Holland of his day. When he gave his seminal *Lectures on Calvinism* in 1898 he introduced his topic by claiming that “Christianity is imperilled by great and serious dangers. Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat.”⁹ This great enemy was Modernism: a view of reality that started not with God but with man; that sought to “construct man himself from the data of nature”¹⁰ rather than from divine revelation.¹¹ Kuyper saw nineteenth century Modernism as the offspring of the French Revolution of 1789 which, with its cry of “No God, No Master,” had effectively declared God to be dead with regard to the state, society and science.¹² In the Revolution there had emerged “a spirit that stole into the historical life of nations and fundamentally set their heart against Christ as the God-anointed king.”¹³ Where there once had been God, there were now “isolated and self-seeking individuals standing up

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 490.

⁷ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 481.

⁸ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 488.

⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11.

¹⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 11.

¹¹ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 97.

¹² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 23.

¹³ Abraham Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 212.

for their own independence.”¹⁴ Yet, far from bringing freedom, this egoism manifested itself in a “State-omnipotence” which ironically was legitimated by nothing deeper than the will of the people.¹⁵ That was France. In Germany, suggested Kuyper, the Modernistic mood expressed itself in philosophical Pantheism.¹⁶ Broadly speaking, Kuyper railed that Pantheism blurred the boundaries between creation and the divine and also identified God with the idea of progress.¹⁷ Under this view of reality, as the state came to be regarded as the “most perfect idea of the relation between man and man” so it took on its own *ego* and will.¹⁸ The result of this worldview was the same as that of the revolutionaries’ in France: the state was afforded ultimate sovereignty. There was nothing, philosophically speaking, greater than the ideals that the state embodied and there was, therefore, no higher authority to which a human being could appeal than the arbitrary laws that the state, at any point in history, had decided to enforce (be that state a republic, a monarchy a Caesar or a despot).¹⁹ Against this supreme state sovereignty of Modernism, Kuyper held up the man-Messiah, upon whom all authority had been absolutely and undividedly conferred.²⁰ Christ, not the state, was the highest authority.²¹ Any authority within a particular sphere of human life was only ever a delegated authority from the one who has all authority. This was the conceptual safeguard against any human authority that had pretensions of being absolute. In fact, even these very spheres were the product not of man but of God. Kuyper argued that there are, woven into the very fabric of reality, ordinances imposed upon nature by God. They cover everything from the heaven above to the earth below; from how the blood courses through the body, to how the lungs work; from logic to aesthetics; from the smallest asteroid to the orbit of the mightiest star; and not least, the domain of

¹⁴ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 98.

¹⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 88.

¹⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 88.

¹⁷ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 102.

¹⁸ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 88-89.

¹⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 89.

²⁰ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 468.

²¹ “All Sovereignty rests in God and can therefore proceed only from Him...the State [along with] every other sphere of life recognizes an authority derived from Him – that is, possesses sovereignty in its own sphere.” Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 468.

morality.²² These ordinances govern the various domains or spheres of life to which they pertain: be that the sphere of science, the state, the household, or of thought etc.²³ Kuyper's point was that each sphere should be allowed to develop organically "before the face of God" according to the ordinances God had laid down for its governance, and hence, growth.²⁴ This was the way to human flourishing. No sphere was to overreach its scope and impose itself on the affairs of another sphere - for this was the great crime of the state under Modernism. The one slight concession to this was that the state was above other spheres of sovereignty in as much as its role was to stop one sphere suppressing another, or individuals suppressing other individuals within the same sphere.²⁵ Moreover, it should be noted that, strictly speaking, Kuyper's thought also contained a second meaning of sphere sovereignty.²⁶ This was the idea not just that the ordinances upon creation meant that different spheres of life developed organically, but that even within those spheres it was legitimate, and even proper, for different institutions to be founded on competing ideologies.²⁷ This is seen clearly in the instance

²² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 70. Kuyper says that "Christ has strengthened in us the ability to walk in this world-order with a firm unflinching step. But the world-order itself remains just what it was from the beginning." Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 71. In this sense his thought is a forerunner to that of O'Donovan who claims that "The Spirit forms and brings to expression *the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality*." Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (2d ed.; Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 25.

²³ Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 467. In fact, sometimes Kuyper spoke as if it were these spheres themselves that were instituted in creation. However Prideaux is probably right to say that technically it was the ordinances that were instituted in creation which then gave rise, organically to the diverse spheres of life. Louise Charlotte Prideaux, "The Fruit of a Two-Fold Grace: An analysis of Abraham Kuyper's distinction between the church as an institute and the church as an organism" (Dissertation, Oak Hill Theological College, 2009), 13.

²⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 53.

²⁵ Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 468.

²⁶ Heslam contends that whereas the subject matter of these two uses of "sphere" is similar, in effect they are two separate ideas. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 160. Prideaux disagrees with this assessment suggesting that the second use is a natural extension of the first. Her argument needs more work to be convincing. Prideaux, "Fruit of a Two-Fold Grace," 14.

²⁷ For a fuller discussion of all the nuances and/or discrepancies within Kuyper's articulation of sphere sovereignty see J. Budziszewski, "Four Shapers of Evangelical Political Thought," in *Evangelicals in the Public Square* (ed. J. Budziszewski; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 64-66. Bolt helpfully

of the Free University. It was not just to be an institution in the academic sphere (and therefore free from the influence of e.g. the political sphere) but also to be run according to a Christian, and even more particularly, according to Calvinistic ideology.²⁸

In terms of the church, Kuyper was clear that it too had its own sphere. “The Christian family is no miniature church; the Christian church is not also a state; the Christian state is not a church.”²⁹ The problem with the Roman Catholic and Anabaptist schemas was that each in their own way denied the distinct sphere of the church; the Roman Catholics by trying to assume control over every other sphere (much like the Modernist state, but for nobler ends), the Anabaptists by isolating themselves from all the other spheres but then trying to replicate the life of those spheres within the sphere of the church.³⁰ Kuyper claimed that only Calvinism had got it right. For under Calvinism,

...every department [of] life...was not emancipated from God, but from the dominion of the Church....Domestic life regained its independence, trade and commerce realised their strength in liberty, art and science were set free from every ecclesiastical bond and restored to their own inspirations, and man began to understand the subjection of all nature with its hidden forces and treasures to

reminds us that rather than seeing sphere sovereignty as “a finely tuned political calculus” we should value it as “an *orientation*, even a rhetorically useful reminder to Christians debating political strategy and policy. It is a general road map not to be used by surveyors or cartographers in political theory.” John Bolt, “Abraham Kuyper and the Search for an Evangelical Public Theology,” in *Evangelicals in the Public Square* (ed. J. Budziszewski; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 145.

²⁸ In other words, we might say that Kuyper’s slight imprecision when talking about sphere-sovereignty meant that in effect he countenanced sub-sphere’s (organized along ideological lines) within the larger life spheres. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 158-160. Heslam suggests that this second meaning of sphere-sovereignty was an aspect of Kuyper’s thought that might have helped lay the foundation for *verzuiling* (that is, the “pillarisation” or vertical separation (as opposed to horizontal socio-economic separation) of Dutch society into its ideologically differentiated people groups: Protestant, Catholic, Liberal, Socialist) that was a mark of Dutch society from 1920-1960. Interaction with this contention is outside the scope of this paper.

²⁹ Sytse Ulbe Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper,” [cited 14 March 2013]. Online: <http://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/zuidema.htm>. 22.

³⁰ See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 30-31.

*himself as a holy duty, imposed upon him by the original ordinances of Paradise.*³¹

The only, but important, difference between the sphere of the church and the other spheres was that of its origin. The other spheres arose organically from the ordinances of creation. As we shall see below, the sphere of the church arose from God's *re-*creative work, which brings us to a discussion of the distinction that Kuyper made between common and special grace.

2. Common grace and special grace

“Does Christ have significance only for the *spiritual* realm or also for the *natural and visible* domain?”³² This was the rhetorical question posed by Kuyper near the beginning of his treatise on common grace. Kuyper completed the content of *De Gemeene Gratie* in 1901, just as he was elected prime minister. Despite the protests of his critics Kuyper maintained that his understanding of common grace was not a speculative invention but rather a greatly expanded and systematised articulation of classic Reformed doctrine.³³ Certainly, insisted Kuyper, Christ's atoning work for the forgiveness of sins must never be pushed into the background, but neither must Christianity go to the opposite extreme and limit itself to a pietistic focus on personal redemption. If this happens then every other sphere of life, art, trade, business, government would be seen as something unholy that “exists *alongside* your Christian religion, not controlled by it.”³⁴ This passion for an outward-looking and expansive Christianity needs to be understood within the overarching battle against Modernism. For in this great enemy, with its anti-God origins, ideas of progress and, as Kuyper explained in 1899, commitment to Evolutionism, was a unified view of the world that boasted explanative power and

³¹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 30.

³² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 171. Author's italics.

³³ We will consider the weight of argument against Kuyper's understanding of common grace in the second chapter of this paper.

³⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 172. Author's italics. This, said Kuyper, was the Anabaptist position which “concentrated all sanctity in the human soul and dug a deep chasm between this inward-looking spirituality and life all around.”

influence over every area of human life.³⁵ Against this, Kuyper's pronounced burden was to present historical Calvinism as the legitimate unified worldview.³⁶ This could not happen unless the eyes of the faithful looked beyond the "very circumscribed circle" of their souls' salvation and were encouraged to live in a thoroughly Christian way in all areas of life.³⁷ Kuyper's teaching on common grace was therefore both an expression of his ire against a Christianity that would seek to flee the world and also a key weapon in his battle to inspire such fully orbed Christian living.³⁸

Kuyper's Calvinism and special grace

Before we look in more detail at common grace, it is important to realise that Kuyper's starting point for his teaching on grace, both common and special, was, unsurprisingly, the organising principle that animated all of his Calvinistic theology: the belief in the sovereignty of God in the widest possible sense. Allied with this was his insistence that true Reformed religion has as its centre of gravity not individual salvation, nor even the body of Christ, but Christ himself. "All things exist *for the sake of Christ*."³⁹ In terms of special grace, this starting point elicited a familiar articulation. Mankind, as a result of sin and the Fall, was in an abnormal condition.⁴⁰ Special grace was "a *saving grace*, which in the end abolishes sin and completely undoes its consequences."⁴¹ This was that grace of God which effected regeneration in the hearts of the elect. The newness it created could not be explained by reference to the old creation; rather, it operated in the terrain of *re-creation*. The source of this special grace was, manifestly, Christ: the one

³⁵ Abraham Kuyper, "Evolution," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998). See Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 96-112.

³⁶ This was Kuyper's express purpose in the *Lectures on Calvinism*. In his opening remarks he stated: "Calvinism, as the only decisive, lawful, and consistent defence for Protestant nations against encroaching, and overwhelming Modernism, - this of itself was bound to be my theme." Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 12.

³⁷ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 172.

³⁸ Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 166.

³⁹ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 170. Author's italics.

⁴⁰ As opposed to the view proposed by Evolutionist theory that mankind's condition was normal and no Fall had occurred. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 54.

⁴¹ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 168.

who is “the beginning and the first-born from the dead.”⁴² Thus by the sovereign working of God’s special grace the elect, that is, the body of Christ are redeemed. Kuyper’s axioms of God’s sovereignty and Christocentricity were thereby maintained in the operation of special grace.

Kuyper’s Calvinism and common grace

Kuyper’s axioms allowed him to posit things about the doctrine of common grace that would have been familiar to any Reformed thinker. But they also allowed him to expand his understanding of the doctrine into far less chartered territory. Uncontroversially, he maintained that common grace was “a *temporal restraining* grace, which holds back and blocks the effects of sin.”⁴³ As such, this grace was in operation from the very moment after Adam and Eve fell, since the death which God promised would be the result of their disobedience, did not follow immediately. Subsequently, in the whole of human existence, wherever “evil does not...manifest itself in all its hideousness, we do not owe it to the fact that our nature is not so deeply corrupt, but to...‘common grace.’”⁴⁴ In this sense common grace was the necessary condition for the operation of special grace. For if Adam and Eve had died immediately, or if human sin had been allowed free reign to cause “hellish” conditions on earth, then the full number of the elect could not have been borne, much less the church been established.⁴⁵ However Kuyper was at pains to point out that, in his opinion, common grace did not “serve...solely to make it possible for the elect to come to salvation.”⁴⁶ Kuyper reminded his followers that Christ’s purpose was not to gather to himself isolated individuals but rather to rule over a new heaven and earth.⁴⁷ Thus, at least in principle, Kuyper established a link between grace and nature. Common grace, as opposed to special grace, was that grace which operated in the terrain of creation, sustaining it and driving its progress. This was the grace that operated in the spheres of education, the state, politics, the family etc. “In common grace there is never anything new, never

⁴² Col. 1:18. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 187.

⁴³ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 168.

⁴⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 124.

⁴⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 169.

⁴⁶ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 169.

⁴⁷ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 173.

anything but what can be explained from the original creation.”⁴⁸ But since, as per Colossians 1:16, Christ is the one by whom and for whom all of creation exists, then the one who is the source of special grace is no less the source of common grace.⁴⁹ Kuyper’s hope was that this articulation of the two-fold grace of God, both originating in the one reality of Christ would be a significant corrective to any Christian who was tempted just to think that God was at work in the inner realm of re-creation. However, it was here that Kuyper began to articulate his more novel interpretation of the doctrine. Kuyper attached a heightened importance to what God was doing by means of common grace: indeed he seems happy to place it alongside God’s work of salvation: “There is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace.”⁵⁰ We will look at this in more detail below, but this other work of God was broadly that of glorifying himself in the process of human progress. These statements about God’s sovereignty and his purpose in glorifying himself were certainly *in line* with Kuyper’s axiomatic principles of Calvinistic theology but, so put, unsurprisingly raised some eyebrows amongst his critics. We will look at such concerns in the third chapter. Finally, it is also worth pointing out that as with many of Kuyper’s terms, he seems to use “common grace” slightly ambiguously. In some instances he seems to use it in a qualitative way to distinguish it from the operation of special grace. In other instances he seems to use it as short hand to refer to the spheres of created life in which the grace operates.⁵¹ Again, we will explore how significant this is, or is not, in the second major section. In the main however, Kuyper’s purpose is clear; speaking of both common and special grace gave Kuyper the language to exhort Christians to be as concerned for their life outside the church as they were for their life within it.

*It is one and the same person who enjoys God’s “common grace” in the life of society and enjoys God’s “special grace” on holy ground. It is one and the same I who is a citizen of the country and member of the church. It is one and the same world in which God causes his common grace to sparkle and glorifies his divine compassion in bringing people to salvation.*⁵²

⁴⁸ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 174.

⁴⁹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 187.

⁵⁰ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 176.

⁵¹ E.g. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 189.

⁵² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 185.

But to what ends was God working in the spheres of common and special grace? The final area that needs to be considered to provide the context for Kuyper's institute/organism distinction is his eschatology.

3. Eschatology and human progress

In his 1891 *Maranatha* address to the ARP Kuyper said of the parousia that “to us it is the decisive fact of the future by which not only our *spiritual life* but also our *political course of conduct* is utterly controlled.”⁵³ Unsurprisingly, given what we have already seen and as this quote alludes, Kuyper was clear that the return of Christ had not just “spiritual” implications for the elect but also implications for creation in general. “Take heart! I have overcome the world”⁵⁴ said Jesus once to his disciples, which Kuyper took to mean that Jesus would not “one day toss the world back into nothingness in order to keep alive only the souls of the elect,” but rather that “the world too will be his conquest, the trophy of his glory.”⁵⁵ Kuyper expressly repudiated premillennialism but it is hard to gauge whether his eschatology is best described as postmillennial or amillennial.⁵⁶ Certainly, as we will see below, there was much optimism in it, but it was not postmillennial triumphalism:

Does the program...concerning the history of the nations offer a preview of progressive Christianization so that, when Jesus returns, he will find them as one kneeling under the shadow of his cross? A sacred state of happiness prevailing everywhere on earth? You know better, for you know Jesus' melancholy question 'And when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?' [Luke 18:8]”⁵⁷

⁵³ Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 207-208. Author's italics. “Maranatha” (taken from the phrase translated as “Come, O Lord” from 1 Corinthians 16:22) was the title of the address that Kuyper gave in 1891 at the opening of the Anti-revolutionary Party convention. At the time of the convention, national elections were pending, following the ARP's first term in power. See Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 205.

⁵⁴ Jn. 16:33.

⁵⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 171.

⁵⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *The Revelation of St. John* (trans. John Hendrik de Vries; Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1935), 271, 276-277.

⁵⁷ Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 211.

When Christ returned he would give “the earth as an inheritance to the meek who have understood and put into practice the summons: ‘Kiss the Son’ (Ps. 2:12).”⁵⁸ For those who had not heeded that summons, who had acquiesced to Satan’s anti-Christian influence through Modernity, Pantheism or whatever, Kuyper was clear that the second advent would be catastrophic. Christ would return “to break all resistance, to do away with those who oppose him.”⁵⁹ Although not a prominent theme for Kuyper he warned that the punishment for such people would be the fiery outer darkness of hell.⁶⁰ As history hurried towards that final judgement Kuyper was again true to his Calvinistic principles in insisting that everything in the world was happening according to God’s sovereign will. “We must emphatically state that the interval of centuries that have passed since the fall is not a blank space in the plan of God. The ages lying behind us...must have a purpose and goal.”⁶¹ The key question, of course, then becomes what is the purpose and goal to which God is working? Given his orthodox views on Christ’s return and the fact that he was a staunch supralapsarianism it might be assumed that his answer would be church centric.⁶² And indeed he exhorted the politicians of the ARP; “what urges you on must be the passionate desire to prepare a people who, at Christ’s return, will not strive against him but welcome him with Hallelujah’s.”⁶³ However, it was not the whole picture. In *Maranatha*, although he affirms the desire for individual salvation, his horizons appear to be broader than an increase in the number of professing Christians or even the maturation of professing Christians.⁶⁴ Kuyper’s rhetoric

⁵⁸ Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 210.

⁵⁹ Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 210.

⁶⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 55.

⁶¹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 175.

⁶² Kuyper always championed the supralapsarian position over the infralapsarian. In 1905 he and his supporters fought and lost a battle in the GKN Synod over what its official position on this matter would be. In the end it adopted infralapsarianism as its preferred position whilst not condemning those who took the opposite view. See Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 192 and Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 167.

⁶³ Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 213.

⁶⁴ For explanation of “Maranatha” see footnote 56 above. Kuyper, “Maranatha,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 213.

deliberately evoked the spirit of patriotic giants from The Netherlands' past.⁶⁵ He wrote in a way that assumed the organic unity of the nation state and without fully developing what he meant by it he spoke explicitly of each nation having to choose as a whole nation whether they would be for Christ or against him on his return.⁶⁶ "The question is what will be instilled in our national spirit, what will appear embodied in our government when our national history will be wrapped up and the harvest stands ripe and ready for the Judge of the nations to appear?"⁶⁷ Taken together with the quote above about Luke 18 it seems as if he was countenancing not the wholesale conversion of all the individuals in the nation but, rather, the conversion of the elect plus the Christianisation of institutions, or, as he would later put it, the "joints" of Dutch civic life.⁶⁸

This idea of the Christianisation of the "joints" of life was taken up in *De Gemeene Gratie*. However it was given even greater impetus as the eschatological implications of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace were more fully expounded. His strong doctrine of God's sovereignty led him to conclude that the extra-Christian world was not given over to "Satan or to fallen humanity or to chance."⁶⁹ Rather, as he looked out across the planet, back on history and forward to that last day, Kuyper was adamant that what he saw was the steady progress of humanity. It was not without its downward turns but the overall trajectory was one of the enrichment of human life, "of perpetual development from less to more, a progressively fuller unfolding of life."⁷⁰ He said that this upward development of humanity was contained in the plan of God and that this "highly

⁶⁵ "For our ancestors a like moment once dawned when the battle for freedom of conscience had to be fought, and *they did not* let it pass by. They did *not* sit still. Rather, under the inspiring leadership of Orange they chose to be ahead of their time, risking their possessions and their lives for the moral uplift of their country so that even today, along with our own nation, all of Europe, even America, is obliged to the vitality and the resilience demonstrated in the era of our greatest glory." Kuyper, "Maranatha," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 227. Author's italics.

⁶⁶ Kuyper, "Maranatha," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 211.

⁶⁷ Kuyper, "Maranatha," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 226.

⁶⁸ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 189.

⁶⁹ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 166.

⁷⁰ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 174.

ramified development...acquires a significance of its own, an independent goal, a reason for being aside from the issue of salvation.”⁷¹ In all the past centuries, in all the various nations or empires that exist or have existed (be that Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian or Roman), all that happened, claimed Kuyper, was an indispensable part of this goal of development, even if it wasn’t possible to connect such happenings to the content of the Christian faith.⁷² He was happy to posit that “if Israel was chosen for the sake of Religion, this in no way prevented a parallel election of the Greeks for the domain of philosophy and for the revelations of art, nor of the Romans for the classical development within the domain of Law and of State.”⁷³ The point of this progress was, said Kuyper, in part, to alleviate human suffering. In his kindness God was gradually revealing to humanity how suffering, that great enemy could be battled.⁷⁴ However the broader explanation for the purpose of human progress was that in bringing humanity to its zenith God was demonstrating his glory as creator.

*If it has pleased God to mirror the richness of his image in the social multiplicity and fullness of our human race...then that richness may not remain concealed...and humanity will have to remain on earth for as long as it takes to unfold as fully and richly as necessary those nuclei of human potential. Then will have occurred that full development of humanity in which all the glory of God's image can mirror itself.*⁷⁵

Kuyper associated this full development of humanity in the sphere of common grace with the fulfilment of the cultural mandate.⁷⁶ The ages would continue not just for the sake of the elect, but so that the world might develop to this consummation. Only then would Jesus return.⁷⁷ Kuyper declared that he was unsure about whether the fruit of this development would last beyond that “conflagration” nor indeed whether it mattered:

⁷¹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 178.

⁷² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 176.

⁷³ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 162.

⁷⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 175.

⁷⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 178.

⁷⁶ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 179.

⁷⁷ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 176.

“Its very completion will have sparkled before God’s eye, and Satan will not have succeeded in preventing its culmination.”⁷⁸

However, Kuyper did not equate outward progress with inner holiness. Indeed, he was aware that the former might be a temptation to the believer.⁷⁹ His strongest statement about this potential for disparity between outer and inner progress came in his discussion of the Antichrist. This “man of sin” would be the epitome of human powers, gifts and talents and so Satan could not usher him onto the stage of history until human progress had reached its peak.⁸⁰ He cautioned that at the hour of its destruction Babylon would be not a “barbarous horde nor the image of coarse bestiality” but rather “a picture of the highest development of which human life is capable.”⁸¹ The outward progress in internal communication, arts, the sciences and modern conveniences would mask the erosion of civic virtue, public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty and the desire of piety: “brilliant on the outside, dead on the inside.”⁸² Whilst not approving of such a discrepancy, it seems as if Kuyper still regarded those *external* fruit of common grace as the outworking of the great plan of God to bring his creation to consummation even where the *internal* fruits of common grace were lacking.

Wherever Christians saw the operation of common grace they were to “honour it.”⁸³ Kuyper doesn’t explain exactly what he means by this but, suffice to say, he was exhorting Christians to be in the vanguard of cultural progress. In terms of external progress they “must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.”⁸⁴ In terms of internal development he

⁷⁸ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 179.

⁷⁹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 179.

⁸⁰ Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 180.

⁸¹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 181.

⁸² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 181.

⁸³ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 193.

⁸⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 31.

cautioned that the external would take a wrong turn (i.e. result in an interior/exterior discrepancy) if Christians withdrew and didn't play their part.⁸⁵

4. Summary

We have briefly sketched the theological context in which Kuyper's institute/organism distinction needs to be understood. We have seen that his overall project was to articulate a concrete and all-expansive view of the world as an alternative to Modernism. To do that he described the spheres of human existence and argued that within those spheres God, not the state or an all-encompassing church was the highest authority. He also urged his hearers to apprehend how God's grace was not just "special" and concerned with inward regeneration, but also "common" and concerned with all life in this creation. Christ was the source of both such graces. Via the medium of common grace God was working to bring his plans for the creation to fulfilment, not just in the salvation of the elect, but in the steady progress of the human race. We now turn to understanding how the church as institute and organism fitted into this schema.

⁸⁵ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 175. It seems that he hoped that this internal development would be the fruit of what he was urging in *Maranatha*.

CHAPTER 2:

AN EXPLANATION OF KUYPER'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AS INSTITUTE AND THE CHURCH AS ORGANISM

Kuyper began his career as a churchman and ended it as a politician. His view of the church, as he embraced these different roles, is one of the more fluid areas of his thought. When, at the age of 33, he delivered *Rooted and Grounded*, he had already begun to think in terms of institute and organism. Broadly speaking his emphasis as a churchman was on the institute and as a politician was on the visible organism.¹ We shall see that as his emphasis shifted, so too did his definitions.

1. The church as institute

In opposition to the national church, of which Kuyper remained a member until 1886, which attempted to include amongst its flock “all the sons and daughters of the land,”² Kuyper envisaged a church that consisted only of believers and their offspring;³ of people who bowed their knee to Christ and who adhered to his ordinances.⁴ The marks of a genuine institutional church were those laid down in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, namely preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising discipline.⁵ Yet Kuyper was imprecise about the scope of what he was referring to when he talked about such an institution. Broadly speaking, it described any official gathering

¹ Zwaanstra claims that “a chronological delineation of the various stages in the development of Kuyper’s conception of the church is no simple matter.” Henry Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” *CTJ* 9 (2 1974): 156. He broadly talks about two stages in Kuyper’s thought: the early stage, up to the Doleantie of 1886; and the later stage after that. As mentioned above I wonder whether we can begin to see a move towards a focus on the organic church earlier than this. He left the pastorate in 1874 and by 1880 had shown his great concern for life outside the ecclesiastical sphere in his speech on sphere sovereignty at the opening of the Free University. However I recognise that it is a moot point.

² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 189.

³ At least that was the ideal. He did allow that, in reality, there would always be some in the visible institute who were not regenerate. In this understanding he was influenced by Schleiermacher. Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 161.

⁴ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 63.

⁵ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 169, Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 63.

of true Christians and everything that made such a gathering possible. This included therefore its creeds, confessions and polity and also its officers and offices: pastors, elders, deacons, presbyteries and synods.⁶ Indeed even an individual Christian did not benefit from any privileges in the institutional church just by being a believer but only in that they were also deemed to hold the general *office* of a believer in the institutional church. Sometimes when Kuyper spoke of the church as institute he seemed to have the gathered idea more in mind, sometimes the official offices and sometimes the means of regulation: but always the definition focused somewhere within this nexus of ideas. He insisted that the local church was the institutional church and he welcomed its plurality of expression around the world. Denominations were not the institutional church - a denomination was nothing more than a federation of independent churches.⁷ In terms of the origin of the church as institute, on the one hand he could say it was human, talking about it as being formed by the will of localised believers who wished to bring order to their confession, but he could also say it was divine: “God’s institution” birthed at Pentecost.⁸ In his sermon *Rooted and Grounded* Kuyper attributed the label “grounded” to the church as institute.⁹ When the bible used images such as the temple or a house or a “pillar and buttress” to refer to the church it was, claimed Kuyper, talking about the “grounded” institutional church.¹⁰

When Kuyper first began writing about the church as institute and the church as organism, he was very clear about the antithesis between the church and the world. The church as institute was the unique sphere which arose from the re-creating work of special grace. “Through the institution alone can the church offer us that unique life sphere where the ground we tread, the air we breathe, the language we speak, and the nourishment of our spirit are not those of the world but of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ The

⁶ Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

⁷ However, because part of his definition of the church as institute included things like synods, he did at times come close to sounding as if he identified the denomination with the church as institute.

⁸ See Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s conception of the Church,” 172 and Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded* (trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman; Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 2013), 14-15.

⁹ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5.

¹⁰ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5. See for example 1 Tim. 3:15.

¹¹ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 16.

foundation upon which this church as institute was to build was the demand of scripture.¹² In line with his view of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper maintained that the institutional church should be free in its own sphere from state interference to pursue its goal of evangelising non-believers and discipling believers.¹³ Yet the church as institution was not just to be inward-looking. Even in 1870 when his focus was still very much on the institutional church he wrote that “The marketplace of the world, not the church, is the arena where we wrestle for the prize.”¹⁴ The institutional church’s influence beyond its walls would always be compromised by an established church structure where the spheres of state and church were blurred. Bratt sums up Kuyper’s position: “precisely because Christianity had so much to contribute to public life...it should make its way as a vital faith instead of as a tool of the state.”¹⁵ We will look in more detail about how the church as institute was to affect the wider culture shortly. However before we do we must begin to discuss Kuyper’s concept of the church as organism for “strictly speaking, the institutional church was not itself essentially church.”¹⁶

2. The church as organism

The invisible organic essence of the church

In using language such as “organism” Kuyper was borrowing ideas from Romantic thinkers such as Schelling and Schleiermacher whose views were influential in the European world of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Romantic thinkers believed that an organism formed “an independent and exclusive whole, had a principle of life all its own...and exerted itself out of an inner power for the realization of its own goal.”¹⁸

¹² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 194.

¹³ From his early days in the NHK Kuyper had taken issue with the idea of an established church precisely because it blurred these boundaries. However his aim had always been to work for reform from within it. Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 172.

¹⁴ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 22.

¹⁵ Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 14.

¹⁶ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 163.

¹⁷ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 156.

¹⁸ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 156.

Breathing in this Romantic air, Kuyper was predisposed to valorise the organic church over and above the more mechanical institute. In fact Kuyper conceived of the whole of the human race as an organism. It was God's purpose to save not just individuals, but this whole organism. Stated like that it might sound as if Kuyper's organic tendencies would have forced him into a universalist view of salvation. They didn't, in fact, because of his dogged adherence to a supralapsarian view of predestination. God had always conceived of his elect as the true organism of humanity. Thus Kuyper was able to say:

*To be sure many branches and leaves fell off the tree of the human race, yet the tree itself shall be saved; on its new root in Christ, it shall once more blossom gloriously. For regeneration does not save a few isolated individuals, finally to be joined together mechanically as an aggregated heap. Regeneration saves the organism, itself, of our race. And therefore all regenerate human life forms one organic body, of which Christ is the Head, and whose members are bound together by their mystical union with Him.*¹⁹

It was this organic body of the elect which was, for Kuyper, the *essence* of the church. This organic church had ontological primacy over the institutional church: "That church, after all, exists before the institute; it lies behind the institute; it alone gives substance and value to that institute."²⁰ This organic church was both heavenly and invisible. It was constituted directly by God via predestination.²¹ Thus, while Kuyper insisted that it was universal, catholic and holy, interestingly he didn't feel the need to talk about its apostolicity, for technically, it was God's work in predestination, not the believers' faith in the apostolic witness, that counted.²² In *Rooted and Grounded* Kuyper maintained that when the bible used organic imagery such as the mustard seed, vine branches, yeast and the body of Christ, it was talking about the church as organism. What, then, of the relationship between the church as organism and the church as institute?

¹⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 59.

²⁰ Kuyper, "Common Grace," in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 195.

²¹ The corollary of this was that it was not, according to Kuyper constituted by any means of grace This conclusion opened the door for the doctrine of presumptive regeneration that would be so detrimental for the Dutch church.

²² Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church," 160.

If the church as organism was the invisible *essence* of the church, the church as institute was the concrete historical *existence* that the church as organism assumed.²³ In line with his organic thinking, Kuyper maintained that the organic church had within it the increased impulse to manifest itself externally as the institutional church. “If there are among...any city...a certain number of living members of this body of Christ, then the essence of the church is there; and this becomes a conscious presence as soon as the members...exercise the communion of saints, and...bring their communion to fuller and purer ecclesiastical manifestation.”²⁴ The organic church without the institutional church was like Eden waiting to be tilled said Kuyper.²⁵ The organic church gave birth to the institute but the institute, by the ministry of the word and church polity, fed and brought order to the church as organism.²⁶ This certainly was Kuyper’s view in the earlier phase of his ministry. Therefore, although it is not precisely the same, for the sake of clarity it is possible to see Kuyper’s early distinction between organism and institute as broadly analogous to the more familiar Reformed distinction between the church invisible and visible.²⁷

Kuyper’s later concept of the visible organic church

The most distinctive feature of Kuyper’s ecclesiology in later years was that he began to speak of visible manifestations of the organic body of Christ outside of the visible church as institute.²⁸ He still maintained, as above, that the organic church was primary and that it gave birth, as it were, to the institutional church but now he began to talk about the church appearing in other spheres of life. The appearances represented “all the temporal and visible evidences and effects of the spiritual power residing in the mystical body of Christ.”²⁹ In 1898 he had written that “there is a concentration of religious light and life in the [institutional] Church, but...in the walls of this church there are wide

²³ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 162.

²⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *Tract for the Reformation of the Churches*. (Acton Institute). 35-36.

²⁵ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 7.

²⁶ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 165, 173.

²⁷ See Appendix for a visual depiction of this.

²⁸ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 177.

²⁹ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 179.

open windows, and through these spacious windows the light of the Eternal has to radiate over the whole world.”³⁰ He now began to articulate more precisely how this should happen. The institutional church was to remain within its own sphere and was to be seen increasingly as solely an institute for the ministry of the word.³¹ The real battle was not to be fought directly through the institute, rather it was to be fought by the visible organic church woven into the “very fabric of national life”³² - that is to say, fought in the spheres of common grace.³³

At the end of *De Gemeene Gratie* Kuyper discussed four “terrains” that, he argued, come into view when Christians look out across the world.³⁴ It was the fourth of these terrains that was for Kuyper the “promised land” in that this was where the church as organism came into its own. An understanding of the first three terrains however is necessary in order to appreciate why. The first is where the terrain of common grace has not been at all influenced by special grace. Kuyper used the example of China in his own time. Of this terrain Kuyper claimed that scripture says “that the world lies in the power of the evil one”³⁵ (which is puzzling given how elsewhere he lauds progress in such realms).³⁶ The second is the terrain of the institutional church which arises exclusively from the operation of special grace when the institutional church is allowed to operate within its own sphere without state interference. The third is the terrain of common grace that is illumined by the light emitted by the lamp of special grace. An example of this would be a “Christian country” where the Christian faith has influenced the laws, and practices of individuals and institutions who themselves want nothing to do with faith and conversion. “The church as organism may...manifest itself where all personal faith is missing but where nevertheless some of the golden glow of eternal life

³⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 53.

³¹ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 178.

³² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 195.

³³ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church,” 178. See Appendix for a visual depiction of this.

³⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 199-201.

³⁵ 1 John 5:19. Interestingly the Greek contains the word ὅλος, suggesting that, as with all major translations, a better rendering would be “that the *whole* world lies in the power of the evil one.”

³⁶ See page 21 above.

is reflected on the ordinary facades of the great edifice of human life.”³⁷ Kuyper said that the abolition of slavery, the improved position of women and maintenance of public virtue were examples of this kind of influence. For Kuyper, this is what Jesus is talking about when he employs the metaphor of the city on a hill casting its light or the birds of the air making their home in the great tree that is the kingdom of heaven.³⁸ In this terrain, although the light of special grace has influenced common grace, they are, like light and the objects on which it falls, essentially distinct entities. In the fourth terrain that distinction no longer exists. This is the terrain on which the church as organism, in its visible concrete activity, allows life in the spheres of common grace to be controlled by the re-creative principles of special grace. The biblical image for this terrain, argued Kuyper, is to be found in Jesus’ metaphor of the lady mixing leaven in with the flour.³⁹ Here there are no separate entities. The flour has been transformed by the leaven. He was exhorting Christians to organise their affairs in the sphere of common grace, be that in education, business, politics or any other enterprise, explicitly on the principles of scripture.⁴⁰ But this was not primarily at the individual level. Kuyper was very doubtful if a Christian could be a part of an establishment not founded on Christian faith without facing conflict with non-Christians over every decision and without eventually yielding to the temptation to compromise his or her faith.⁴¹ Rather he envisioned whole

³⁷ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 195.

³⁸ Matt. 5:14; 13:32.

³⁹ Matt. 13:33.

⁴⁰ VanDrunen helpfully summarises the difference between these third and fourth terrains: “Christian nations or societies exist on the plane of common grace, influenced by special grace but not presupposing faith on the part of the members of the nation or society [third terrain]; a Christian school or press, in distinction, exists on the plane of special grace, as believers form their own associations in the various societal spheres and seek to let special revelation control common grace arenas [fourth terrain].” David VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *CTJ* 42 (2 2007): 297.

⁴¹ Abraham Kuyper, “Pro Rege,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 483, 484.

institutions guided by the outworking of a self-consciously Christian worldview. This is precisely what he was attempting to achieve with the Free University.⁴²

⁴² Bratt considers this university project as being “at the heart of Kuyper’s dreams. Here he could fulfill all his callings at once: scholar, institution-builder, leader, liberator, and guide of the common people.” Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 461.

CHAPTER 3:

AN ANALYSIS OF KUYPER'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AS INSTITUTE AND THE CHURCH AS ORGANISM

We turn our attention now to an analysis of Kuyper's distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism. Ultimately we will conclude that Kuyper's distinction is based on questionable exegesis and *a priori* assumptions. We will suggest that the distinction creates a sub-biblical duality in what the church actually is, the ultimate effect of which is to allow the visible organic church to become conceptually detached from the gathered local church. Moreover we will attempt to show that this duality was one of a number of dualities in Kuyper's wider schema. However our assessment is not exclusively negative. There is a vast amount to appreciate in Kuyper's schema, even if in the final count his practice did not live up to his lofty and inspirational ideals.

1. Appreciation of Kuyper's holistic vision

Kuyper's articulation of sphere sovereignty, his relatively narrow definition of the institutional church and his insistence that it be the locus of special revelation allowed him to preserve a unique and exalted place for the preaching of the word in the Sunday gathering: "Among the office-bearers of the church, the ministers of the Word occupy the first place."¹ And this word was, by its infallible nature, never anything less than authoritative: "To oppose this infallibility and yet to come to the congregation with the claim "it is written," is to pretend to confess what one denies, and is therefore immoral."² All of which ensured that, in line with the Belgic confession's definition of what constituted a real church, all worship was governed according to the "pure Word of God."³ Yet even when Kuyper's focus had shifted into the political arena and he

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Tract for the Reformation of the Churches*. 64 (Acton Institute). Unpublished.

² Abraham Kuyper, *Tract for the Reformation of the Churches*. 65 (Acton Institute).

³ "The Belgic Confession," Article 29 [cited 20 May 2013]. Online: <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html>.

began to speak of the visible organic church Kuyper stated that any potential for seeing Christ's lordship exercised in the spheres of common grace would be lost if the light of God's word was extinguished from the institutional church. What this meant was that at least in theory all Christian activity whether in the gathered worship or in the other spheres of life was anchored to the word of God.

This adherence to the word of God, whilst to be applauded, is by no means unique amongst those who subscribed to full-blooded Calvinism. What Kuyper is, rightly, best known for is his attempt to apply the tenets of Calvinism to life outside the institutional church in an attempt to articulate a robust and expansive view of all reality under God. The Modernistic ideologies of Pantheism and Evolution did not allow of any compartmentalism of human existence and so, therefore, nor could Kuyper's Calvinism. Pietism that retreated from asking the question of how Christ's lordship affected all of life would not do, nor would the otherworldliness of the Anabaptists. Kuyper's writings exposed the fundamental difference between the foundations of Christianity and any other world view. He taught the church the need to think concretely and to build on its own pre-suppositions, and he challenged the church to ensure its categories of thought had explanative power over all of reality.⁴ It is hard not to marvel at Kuyper as he addresses one after another the topics of religion, politics, art and science in the *Lectures on Calvinism*. The scope of his thinking and the degree to which so much of life integrated under his Calvinistic worldview explains why he is so influential, even today. The Christian "is a pilgrim, not in the sense that he is marching through a world with which he has no concern, but in the sense that at every step of the long way he must remember his responsibility to that God so full of majesty, who awaits him at his journey's end."⁵ Human life is an organism and it is this organism, with all its multifarious "joints" of civic life, that, according to Kuyper, God is in the process of redeeming. By emphasising common grace, and insisting that it, no less than special grace, had, as its ultimate end, God's glory, Kuyper was able to create the conceptual framework of how God was working outside the church as institute. By speaking of the visible organic church he essentially created the tools by which Christians were to

⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace & The Gospel* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 35.

⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 69-70.

involve themselves in this task. One of the great triumphs of this was that it was radically anti clericalism – all of life was important, not just the work of the officers of the church.

*Wherever man may stand...to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science, he is...constantly standing before the face of his God, he is employed in the service of his God, he has strictly to obey his God, and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.*⁶

This obedience, would, by definition, be expansive: for example, “all Christian political action will have to be more than lobbying for legislation to preserve the ‘Christian heritage’ of Sunday observance: it will have to be the expression of a political philosophy and program that touches upon every aspect of political life.”⁷ Moreover by tying the spheres of common grace so closely to creation Kuyper was able to argue that the organic church’s activity in those spheres was not something strange or otherworldly but the duty of a human being as a human being: “A Christian marriage is an ordinary marriage, a Christian society is an ordinary society, a Christian family is an ordinary family, a Christian state is an ordinary state, a Christian association is an ordinary association.”⁸ Yet all this activity was, in the ideal, to be governed by the word of God. Even as a politician Kuyper was diligent to ensure that his political principles were seen to come from scripture. Indeed, his last major work was not a political or cultural treatise but a series of over three hundred meditations *Concerning the Consummation* which included reflections on the eschatological sayings of Jesus and the book of Revelation.¹ However, at what cost did Kuyper posit his distinction between the institutional and organic church?

2. Two churches

To conceive of the visible or local church, in contrast to the church as organism, as only an institute for the service of the Word, only of practical value, a phenomenon of only passing significance, is to damage

⁶ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 53.

⁷ Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action,” 22.

⁸ Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action,” 22.

*its character, lower its destiny, and attack its essence. It becomes just one manifestation of the real church set next to and on one line with other manifestations, for instance in the social or scholarly domain.*⁹

So warned one of Kyper's traditional Reformed critics in 1896. In this vein we must now turn to ask some hard questions of Kuyper's distinction between the church as organism and institute. As we have just seen, as a key element in Kuyper's overall schema, it allowed and urged a fully orbed Christian involvement in all areas of life. However the main contention that we will make is that despite its obvious practical benefits vis-à-vis the need for cultural engagement, it is ultimately a sub-biblical separation. "By placing the church as institute alongside the church as a visible organism and assigning specifically different tasks to each, the conceptual unity of the church as an historical existing reality was seriously compromised, if not lost."¹⁰ To be sure, this problem was not just the product of Kuyper's ecclesiology – it also had much to do with his lionisation of human progress and his doctrine of common grace - However in this section we will attempt to show how his faulty ecclesiology contributed to it.

"Rooted" and "Grounded" amounts to a forced distinction

As we have already discussed Kuyper explicitly developed his institute/organism distinction in *Rooted and Grounded*. He took this phrase "rooted and grounded" from Ephesians 3:17 and made much of the contrast that he believed he saw in that text. We have talked briefly about the images that Kuyper attached to each aspect of the church's life, but a fuller explanation is now in order. "'Rooted' is the metaphor describing the free life that arises not through human artistry but immediately from the hand of the Creator, bearing in its own core the power of life and in its own seed the law of its life."¹¹ Organic metaphors such as Jesus being the true vine and the kingdom of God being like leaven mixed in with the flower were "rooted" metaphors. The former described the organic bond that believers have to Jesus, which were it to be separated would result in withering. The latter described the fermentation process that happened

⁹ As quoted in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 191.

¹⁰ Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's conception of the Church," 181.

¹¹ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5.

without human endeavour. The “rooted” metaphor for the church *par excellence* was, for Kuyper, that of the body: “an image that requires organic life, a figure that ties the parts together by means of a power operating invisibly, one that refers to a natural growth occurring not through something added but through a force that comes to outward expression from the inside.”¹² Note the common idea in these metaphors of a “vital” growth that requires no human agency. By way of contrast “grounded” metaphors were “drawn not from *nature* but from *the work of human hands*.”¹³ These included those of the house, the temple and ultimately the city. “The church does not only grow, but is also *built*.”¹⁴ Although not categorically stated the strong implication is that human agency *is* required when this suite of metaphors is considered. Kuyper claimed that this dual stream of metaphors corresponded with and indeed proved that he was right to conceptualise the church as organism and institute. The “rooted” metaphors were those that described the church as organism and the “grounded” metaphors were those that described the church as institute. The phrase in Ephesians, said Kuyper, was proof that “Scripture itself refuses to allow any separation, it weaves them together.”¹⁵ However it is our contention that to claim this, is to misread scripture in asserting that there are these two categories of metaphor in the first place.¹⁶ For example take the organic image of the body in Ephesians 4.1-16. Far from excluding human agency in the growth of this body into maturity Paul is making precisely the point that each “part” must do its work of “speaking the truth in love” if this growth is to happen.¹⁷ Or again take the image of the city. In Hebrews 11:10 the city that Abraham is seeking is worth his nomadic existence precisely because it is not built by human hands but by God. And indeed, far from being a description of any temporal, visible church institution, it is clearly the eschatological city that is in view. The “rooted” and “grounded” metaphors are further blurred in passages such as 1 Peter 2:5 where the scattered Christians are described as “living stones,...built into a spiritual house.” In 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 where Paul uses the body metaphor again, there is ambiguity as to whether he is

¹² Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5.

¹³ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5. Author’s italics.

¹⁴ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5. Author’s italics.

¹⁵ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5.

¹⁶ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 5.

¹⁷ Eph. 4:15-16.

speaking of the universal “organic” church or the “institutional” local church. In 1 Timothy 3:15 the local “institutional” church is called the “pillar and foundation of the truth” whilst in Revelation 3:12 the pillar metaphor is again used but this time to describe what an individual believer will be in God’s metaphorical eschatological temple. The point of these examples is to prove that the bible writers mix and merge what Kuyper delineates as “rooted” and “grounded” metaphors across descriptions of both the local and universal church, the temporal and the eschatological, the “institute” and the “organism.” Kuyper’s schema is too simplistic.

In his essay on interpreting biblical models of the church, Clowney counsels that “there is a difference between a metaphor and a model.”¹⁸ In Kuyper’s schema he seems to have taken what he sees as the two strands of *metaphor* – one “rooted,” the other “grounded” – and concretised these into his organic/institute *model*. However as Clowney warns, “the metaphor that would be extended for use as a model must be such that other scriptural metaphors and non-metaphorical statements can be included in it.”¹⁹ As we have seen above Kuyper’s distinction does not easily integrate the biblical metaphors: he is in danger not only of making a separation where the bible will not allow one but also of prejudicing the organic by relating it explicitly to God’s unmediated action. Interestingly Kuyper is not unaware of the way that the bible combines “organic” and “institutional” metaphors: “by means of the living stone, the metaphor of the building flows over into that of the organism.” However it seems that his starting point is the ontological division between these two perspectives of the church and that in his opinion the bible writers are mixing their metaphors only so as to remind us that we need to think about both. It does not seem to occur to him that there might be only one ontological reality of “the church” and that this is mysterious enough that human language can only adequately move towards describing it by appeal to metaphors that seem to merge, what are to us, discrete classes of imagery.

¹⁸ Edmund P. Clowney, “Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church* (ed. D.A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 78.

¹⁹ Clowney, “Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church,” in Carson, *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, 82.

“The One” is given primacy over “The Many” in Kuyper’s conception of the universal church

*We believe and confess one single catholic or universal church- a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.*²⁰

So states Article 27 of the Belgic confession. Speaking specifically of this article in his *Tract for the Reformation of the Churches*, which he wrote in 1883 Kuyper claimed that “nothing needs to be subtracted from or added to the description our fathers gave.”²¹ However, while he stated this formally, it is our opinion that he did not fully do justice to the congregational or gathered idea of the universal church in other of his prominent works. Or to put it another way, the organic body of Christ was, for Kuyper, the primary category in all his thinking about the universal church.

We have already seen how Kuyper’s categorisation of biblical metaphors of the church introduced a division that is not supported by closer analysis of those metaphors. We now need to consider more fully Kuyper’s predilection for the organic. As previously discussed, Kuyper’s “invisible organism” had ontological primacy over the gathered institute. However as the discussion of metaphors above has hinted, it is our contention that it is just as legitimate to speak of the “congregation” or the “gathering” as the ultimate category as it is of the organic whole. Consider, for example, the description in Hebrews 12. The writer reminds the Christians that, in contrast to the *gathering* around Mount Sinai: “You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church [ἐκκλησία] of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”²² How

²⁰ “The Belgic Confession,” Article 27. [cited 20 May 2013]. Online: <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html>.

²¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Tract for the Reformation of the Churches*. 37 (Acton Institute). Unpublished. Kuyper would use the principles laid down in this monograph as the basis of the stand which he took in the Doleantie.

²² Heb. 12:22-23.

could we say that this is somehow a non-ultimate description of the church? Or that this is not a description of the essence of the church? It is clearly a description of the cosmic, eschatological gathering of God's people. Yet if we were to follow Kuyper's logic we would be forced to conclude that the writer indeed is speaking of a non-ultimate reality. But again take the description in Revelation 7: "I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."²³ We must insist that "the gathered" is as ultimate as "the organic whole." Both are foundational. And we do not want to be heard as if going in the opposite direction and insisting that "the gathered" is the ultimate category. No, Ephesians and Colossians are very happy to use the organic image of the body as the ultimate category for the church.²⁴ What we are arguing is that it is not legitimate to prejudice a conception of what the ultimate reality of the church is that lays the emphasis on the "oneness" over a conception that lays the emphasis on the "the many." In Revelation 21 where John beholds the eschatological fullness of the church he can describe it in the same breath as both the bride – i.e. "the one" – and the city – "the many."²⁵ We must count both as foundational in the same way that the one and the many of the Trinity are foundational. Kuyper really only has "the one," i.e. the "organic" as foundational. We now turn to argue that, having first created an illegitimate dichotomy between organic and institutional metaphors for the church, and having second, and related, downplayed the gathered nature of the *universal* church, Kuyper also down played the gathered idea of the *local* church.

The "visible organic church" moniker downplays the "gathered" idea of local church

Green writes that "to use the singular word 'church' for something that never met would stretch the word impossibly."²⁶ The writers of the LXX consistently used ἐκκλησία to translate עֵדוּת which was the Hebrew word used to describe God's solemn gathering of his people, typified in the Sinai meeting. עֵדוּת was not a synonym for God's people in

²³ Rev. 7:9.

²⁴ Eph. 1:22-23, Col. 1:18.

²⁵ Rev. 21:2.

²⁶ Chris Green, *The Message of the Church* (BST; Nottingham: IVP, 2013), 34.

general but depicted them in their gathered state.²⁷ In secular Greek use ἐκκλησία often meant no more than a gathering of people.²⁸ Indeed in Acts 19 it is used to denote the gathering of Ephesian city-folk.²⁹ A survey of the 144 uses of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament reveals that the word “refers almost exclusively to the concrete assembly of Christians at a specific place.”³⁰ This “specific place” is either the local gathering of believers or the universal, heavenly and simultaneously eschatological gathering of all believers around the throne/Mount Zion.³¹ It is never used to describe all the believers alive on earth at any one point in time, nor all those believers in a particular geographical region, nor is it used in the singular to refer to the aggregate of a multitude of local churches.³² Overall then, we may agree with Volf when he says that the word ἐκκλησία was used because “the church does manifest itself concretely in the act of assembling for worship, and this is constitutive for its ecclesiality.”³³ Our concern with Kuyper’s schema is that, in speaking of a “visible organic church,” Kuyper was in danger of evacuating the word “church” of any notion of “the gathered,” or, to put it

²⁷ Green, *Church*, 19.

²⁸ BDAG 303b.

²⁹ Acts 19:32,40.

³⁰ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 137. (Although Volf makes some pertinent observations, in general we would want to distance ourselves from his Social Trinitarianism.)

³¹ We have seen above how it is used in the latter sense. Examples of where it is used in the former sense are numerous e.g. Antioch (Acts 14:27), Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), Philippi (Phi. 4:15) etc. It is worth clarifying that in emphasising the idea of “gatheredness” inherent in ἐκκλησία, we are not implying that the local church blinks out of existence when it is not gathered. 1 Cor. 14:23 makes it clear that “the church is not simply an act of assembling; rather it assembles at a specific place.” Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 137.

³² The only possible exception to this seems to be Acts 9:31 where we are told that “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.” However, paying careful attention to the narrative of Acts will help here. Up until Acts 8:1 the church had only existed on earth in one place, Jerusalem. After being persecuted by Paul, the Jerusalem church is scattered. It is this church that is then referred to in Acts 9:31 (Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offence of God’s Love* (Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 201). This is a unique usage in the New Testament and the assumption is that that scattered gathering subsequently multiplied into numerous discrete gatherings/churches (Green, *Church*, 35).

³³ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 137.

another way, of dislocating the visible organic church from any concrete congregation. This was especially true when he said, as we read earlier, that “the church as organism may...manifest itself where all personal faith is missing but where nevertheless some of the golden glow of eternal life is reflected on the ordinary facades of the great edifice of human life.”³⁴ It may, of course, have been the case that Kuyper envisaged that anything attributable to the visible organic church in any specific instance could only be so attributed if those same people, at some point, met together in a unique local institutional church. However this seems unlikely: firstly because he does not appear to specifically state this; secondly because logistically it is unlikely that every Christian involved in the Free University, for example, would have attended the same institutional church; and thirdly by saying the organic church manifested itself, at least in part on the impersonal “facades” Kuyper abstracted the organic church away from identifiable individuals and therefore from a gathering.

Summary

In the above three subsections we have raised concerns about the fundamental categories in Kuyper’s institute/organism schema. In the first instance he has posited too clear cut a distinction between what he contended were the metaphors for church as institute and the church as organism. In misreading the metaphors he has begun to articulate an ontological division in his two churches where the organic is described more in terms of God’s work and the institute is described more in terms of human work: “Eden is planted, but mankind will cultivate it.”³⁵ Our contention has been that the metaphors in scripture do not bear out this distinction. Next we have discussed what the ultimate category for thinking about church should be. The distinction, if we may so call it, that Kuyper was feeling his way towards, is best understood as an instance of the-one-and-the-many mystery at the heart of faith in the Triune God. A biblical understanding of the church acknowledges that we must speak about both the organic whole and gathered many as the ultimate categories of church. What we cannot do is prejudice one over the other. Kuyper seems to inherently prejudice the organic whole. On top of this he did not seem to pay close enough attention to the meaning and usage

³⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 195.

³⁵ Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded*, 33.

of the word ἐκκλησία in scripture. The cumulative effect was that it was easy for him as his career developed to downplay the significance of the gathered local church by speaking of the visible organic church in a way that allowed it, at least conceptually, to define itself without reference to the gathered local church.³⁶ We will discuss in more detail why this was serious in our concluding chapter. Suffice, for now, to say that the visible organic church was free, in some sense, to have a life, and, as we shall now argue, a mission that was insufficiently “Christian.”

3. Two works of God

We have already remarked that Kuyper was a staunch supralapsarian. Mouw writes of those who hold such a view: “If we ask a supralapsarian a question about anything that happens in the universe the full and correct answer should always be articulated in terms of the eternal destinies of the elect and the reprobate.”³⁷ However, much of Kuyper’s later thought appears to be inconsistent or, at least, moving away from his professed supralapsarianism. We have already heard him say that “there is beside the great work of God in *special* grace also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common* grace.”³⁸ Where did this idea that “the development of the powers of nature by means of common grace is something independent of God’s work of saving grace” come from?³⁹ What was it that caused him to speak as if there was a “dualism in the work of God”?⁴⁰

³⁶ Without wanting to make too much of it, is it significant that Kuyper had a “personal preference for taking the sacrament amid strangers, where he and they would not be distracted by knowledge of each other’s sins and questions of adequate repentance”? Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 190.

³⁷ Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 61. He continues: “Why did Plato write *The Republic*?...Why did Babe Ruth hit sixty home runs in one season? Why did President Kennedy approve the plan for the Bay of Pigs invasion?...In every case the answer is that the ultimate point of these events is to promote the realization of God’s decision regarding elect and reprobate human beings.”

³⁸ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 176. Author’s italics.

³⁹ Van Til, *Common Grace & The Gospel*, 228.

⁴⁰ Charles J. Terpstra, “Abraham Kuyper, Developer and Promoter of Common Grace,” *Standard Bearer* 75 (2 1998): accessed online http://www.mountainretreatorg.net/articles/kuyper_terp.html. I am aware the Terpstra does not believe in common grace at all. This is not the position that I hold.

We will suggest that there were three reasons which, if they did not make this tendency to “dualism” inevitable, certainly were always a pull in that direction.

The first of these reasons was that Kuyper seems to have *a priori* assumed and valorised human progress. Kuyper denounced the Evolutionary worldview as a “toxic slime” left on the shores by the Pantheistic stream.⁴¹ And although he did, in theory, countenance the idea that God may have been pleased to use evolutionistic creation he still maintained that this was different from Darwinism because it presupposed God’s foreordained purpose.⁴² However, as he addressed his American audience at Princeton University in 1898 he was still bold enough to declare that “the broad stream of the development of our race runs from Babylon to San Francisco, through the five stadia of Babylonian-Egyptian, Greek-Roman, Islamitic, Romanistic and Calvinistic civilization.”⁴³ His purpose in using such rhetoric was to instil in his hearers a sense of responsibility to stand against the tide of Modernism. However, to do so he had to lean heavily on Darwinian ideas of progress.⁴⁴ “Calvinism...meets every required condition for the advancement of human development *to a higher stage*.”⁴⁵ Heslam’s conclusion is that Kuyper “came to a position characteristic of much nineteenth-century evolutionary thought, adopted by mainstream liberalism, that humanity was involved in a process of evolutionary development from primitive to advanced stages.”⁴⁶ One may at this point wonder what effect, if any, the Great War would have had on his thinking. He certainly acknowledged that “the misery that is now sweeping the world shows the bankruptcy of all scientific socio-political, and diplomatic striving outside of [commitment to] the high God.”⁴⁷ However he saw this more as a portent that the end of all things was at hand, and the parousia imminent, than evidence to cause him to recant

⁴¹ Abraham Kuyper, “The Blurring of the Boundaries,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (ed. James D. Bratt; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 378.

⁴² Kuyper, “Evolution,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 437.

⁴³ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 34.

⁴⁴ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 109.

⁴⁵ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 38. Author’s italics.

⁴⁶ Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 108.

⁴⁷ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 369. Quoted from one of Kuyper’s daily commentaries on the war in *De Heraut*.

his belief in human progress.⁴⁸ It is a disturbing irony that this stalwart against Modernism was himself, perhaps, unduly and insidiously influenced by the Pantheistic and Evolutionary zeitgeist.

The second of these reasons was his valorisation of the organic, (which we have already discussed in detail above, in relation to his ecclesiology.) This valorisation came in part from the influence of Pantheism and also from Romantic thought. An exploration of the depth and nuance of Romantic thinking is outside the scope of this paper. However, it is worth noticing the caution of one introductory book on Romanticism that “the problem with organicist thinking is that it valorizes an abstract ‘totality’ outside the experience of individuals.”⁴⁹ We wonder whether this trend is what we are observing when we hear Kuyper speaking of the Christianisation of the “joints” of society. This is linked with the third reason: Kuyper’s nationalism. Again, writers have observed a link with Romantic thought and the idea of a free, organically-developing nation state subject to no-one.⁵⁰ We have already remarked in *Maranatha* how Kuyper appealed to the Dutch national identity. Bolt warns against how “linking national destiny too closely with divine providential purpose...encourages idolatry.”⁵¹ Kuyper certainly seems to come close to this idolatry at certain points. He could say that “the history of our race does not aim at the improvement of any single tribe, but at the development of *mankind* taken as a whole.”⁵² However this development would come through the commingling of ethnic blood: As the nations of Western Europe found their way to America there was effected “the re-union of their members in one higher unity, hitherto constantly assimilated by the American type.”⁵³ This was merely a transference of nationalistic pride from The Netherlands to America.

⁴⁸ Kuyper, *Revelation*, 109.

⁴⁹ Duncan Heath and Judy Boreham, *Introducing Romanticism* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2005), 34.

⁵⁰ See for example Peter J. Kitson, “Politics,” in *Romanticism* (ed. Nicholas Roe; An Oxford Guide; Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 680 and Timothy Morton, “Environmentalism,” in *Romanticism* (ed. Nicholas Roe; An Oxford Guide; Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 697-698.

⁵¹ Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 224.

⁵² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 36.

⁵³ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 37.

Valorising both progress and the organic-whole national identity meant that it was all too easy for Kuyper to begin to think more about cultural transformation of the nation (and indeed, in some sense, of the world) and less about the salvation of the elect than would have been normal in the Reformed tradition. Kuyper *stated* that “the cross of Christ has with good reason been called the center of world history. It is the point on which all the lines of the past converge and from which all the lines for the future receive their direction.”⁵⁴ However he was never able to articulate how God’s great work, in common grace, of cultural transformation was thoroughly Christian. Ironically, an over emphasis on common grace contributed to this as we shall now see.

4. Two graces and a duality to Christ’s lordship

“Although earlier Reformed theologians spoke of God’s sustaining the world in general and his preservation and blessing of civil society in particular, they did not use common grace as a distinct and organizing category.”⁵⁵ Kuyper did. We have already seen how his “dominant message was that only a full engagement by Christians in every area of culture was consistent with a biblical view of the world.”⁵⁶ His doctrine of common grace was, he thought, what enabled such engagement. However, we will argue that the prominent place that he gave to common grace actually worked to undermine his programme.

We start by returning to a passage that we have already looked at:

*It is one and the same person who enjoys God’s “common grace” in the life of society and enjoys God’s “special grace” on holy ground. It is one and the same I who is a citizen of the country and member of the church. It is one and the same world in which God causes his common grace to sparkle and glorifies his divine compassion in bringing people to salvation.*⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 182.

⁵⁵ VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” 299.

⁵⁶ Jeremy Begbie, “Creation, Christ and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism,” in *Christ in our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World* (ed. Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell; Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 114.

⁵⁷ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 185.

What is Kuyper really arguing for here? When he says that a Christian is to enjoy common grace in the life of society, does he mean in the sense of being involved in institutions operating on what he calls the fourth terrain (i.e. which are run specifically on the principles of special grace)? In which case, however, is that person really enjoying *common* grace? Is it *common* grace that is sparkling? Certainly he or she is not, by definition, in the *sphere* of the institutional church, but they cannot be said to be enjoying *common* grace at that point precisely because it has been transformed into *special* grace. If this is what he means then, in effect, his whole emphasis on *common* grace is for nothing and all of a Christian's life can be construed in terms of *special* grace. However, if we take him at his word in this passage then it is more likely that by saying the Christian enjoys *common* grace in society then he is at least referring to the enjoyment of the steady progress of society that Kuyper thought that God effected fairly uniformly across the planet through common grace. More specifically, it is also likely that Kuyper is referring to the development of the third type of terrain. On this terrain common grace is influenced by special grace so as to develop its inner potencies better than it would do otherwise.⁵⁸ Albeit in a different way to the fourth terrain, he *was* happy to call this terrain "Christian" as well. (This, of course, comported with all the pressures to talk of the two works of God as discussed in the previous section.) And yet it remained in the realm of common grace. However, by his own definition the realm of common grace was always and only ever of a piece with creation. There was nothing of *re-creation* in any of the spheres of common grace. Therefore to say that a Christian enjoys Gods common grace in society and special re-creating grace in the institutional church sounds very much as if the Christian "functions in two realms: the one which includes his earthly cultural pursuits, and the other which concerns his salvation."⁵⁹ When put like this it is easy to see how it is not at all difficult to make a case, as VanDrunen does, that Kuyper, for all his desire to inculcate in the faithful a fully orbbed Christian worldview, actually sits very comfortably within a Reformed Two Kingdoms

⁵⁸ VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions," 305.

⁵⁹ Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture," in Hart and Thimell, *Christ in our Place*, 128.

tradition.⁶⁰ Kuyper tries to shore up his position against any charge that his doctrine of common grace espouses a dualistic schema by reference to Christ. We have already seen how he argues that Christ is the source of both common and special grace. However again there is perhaps less unity than might at first appear. It is generally attested both by those who want to claim Kuyper as standing in the Two Kingdoms tradition and by those who want to claim him as a Transformationist, that, for Kuyper “common grace rests in Christ the Son of God as the Mediator of Creation; particular grace is rooted in Christ as the Incarnate Word, the Mediator of Redemption.”⁶¹ Of course we do not wish to mingle Christ’s human and divine natures but the fact remains that that the ascended Christ is ruling from heaven as a man. Kuyper may have defined the origin of common and special grace as being the one person of Christ, but he has not done enough to reconcile the telos of both graces in Christ the ascended King. At one point he suggests that the cultural mandate will be fulfilled by common grace alone without reference to special grace.⁶² This ignores passages like Hebrews 2:1-12 where the risen Christ is shown to be the fulfilment of humanity and the cultural mandate precisely because he is the one who as a human has redeemed that humanity. As it stands, it sounds as if when Kuyper famously said that “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!’”,⁶³ that this lordship is not without differentiation. Over the realm of special grace he claims lordship *qua* Christ the redeemer. Over the realms of common grace he claims lordship *qua* Son of God. This again, sounds very much like the dual mediatorship of Christ most often associated with the Two Kingdoms tradition. Certainly Kuyper’s most quoted line is possibly a much more nuanced, and we might say weaker, statement than it is often taken to be.

⁶⁰ VanDrunen also argues that Kuyper’s conception of the creation ordinances within the spheres of common grace bears certain similarities to the Reformed notion of natural law. We have sympathy with this contention however space does not permit engagement with it here.

⁶¹ Zuidema, “Common Grace and Christian Action,” 17. Also VanDrunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” 302. Also Begbie, “Creation, Christ and Culture,” in Hart and Thimell, *Christ in our Place*, 127.

⁶² Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 179.

⁶³ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 488.

5. Summary

That the word preached in the institutional church was, at best, to instruct the visible organic church, did not do enough to ensure the conceptual unity of the institute and organic. Kuyper's distinction meant that it was possible for the visible organic church to define itself ontologically with minimal reference to the gathered local church. This coupled with the fact that Kuyper valorised progress, and the fact that his emphasis on common grace served to limit the scope of Christ's lordship meant that there were not enough safeguards in Kuyper's schema against the visible organic church being co-opted as a tool merely for the amelioration of society and culture.

CHAPTER 4:

CONCLUSION

1. Concerning Kuyper's distinction and his general methodology

We started by noting that in the thorny topic of evangelical public theology Kuyper's distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism seems to have much to commend it. On the one hand, it promises the ability to ring fence the institutional church as the place where God's word, the bible is given an exalted and foundational role. It allows us to speak of the "mission" of the institutional church as evangelism and discipleship. On the other hand, speaking of the organic church promises to ensure that the Christian community does not become inward looking at the expense of interaction with the wider world. We have seen how, on his own terms, this was precisely what Kuyper was aiming to achieve in his overall schema and particularly his ecclesial distinction. Indeed, his goals were, arguably, even more expansive in as much as he explicitly designed his project to be an articulation of Calvinism as a worldview which was both concrete and all-expansive and which could go head-to-head with Modernism and triumph. In all these things we must applaud Kuyper and lament the lack of such fully orbited thinking in the evangelical world today. However it is with regret that we must conclude that the terms "church as institute" and "church as organism" as Kuyper uses them should be rejected.

We have seen how Kuyper's institute/organism distinction was based firstly on a false antithesis between "rooted" and "grounded" metaphors in scripture, secondly on a wrong notion that the church's ultimate reality is "organic", over and above "gathered", and thirdly on a use of the word ἐκκλησία that ignores the fact that the bible always uses that word to refer to a gathering. The result of this sub-biblical distinction is that the visible organic church can be allowed to slip the moorings of the local gathering of believers. Or to rephrase the criticism: to call it the "visible organic church" is to label as "church" what the bible does not. We contend that this is a dangerous trajectory. In the first instance it allows there to be a loss of focus on the institutional church. This raises the prospect that the visible organic church can define itself as "church" apart from a regular gathering of believers in whose midst the word is preached and the

sacraments administered. If it does so, then its access to re-creating special revelation will be lost. By extension, if it is possible to call the Free University, for example, the “visible organic church” then what is to stop an individual believer thinking that membership of that institution constitutes them as a Christian? It will not just be those from a Free Church or Baptist tradition who will balk at such a possibility and want to argue strongly that it is membership of a local church that, in some sense, constitutes a person as a Christian. In the second instance it allows for there to be an increased focus on the organic church. This was particularly true in Kuyper’s case because of his tendency to talk of two plans of God. As we have seen Kuyper’s ambition was to construe the visible organic church as the means by which Christians could live out Christ’s lordship in every area of life. However we have also seen that at its worst what this amounted to was no more than being agents for the general improvement of society without any reference to *re-creation*. If this becomes the priority then church neglects its role in doing what no one else can or will do: offering the hope of forgiveness to sinners facing God’s wrath.

For Kuyper’s overall schema to have succeeded, he would have needed to find a way to speak of the church, both gathered around word and sacrament and going about its business in the other spheres of life in a unified rather than a dichotomised way. He would have had to conceptualise all of God’s sovereign action in history as a unified whole rather than positing that the development of humanity was a separate work alongside that of the salvation of the elect. And he would have had to find a way of speaking about common and special grace that insisted that Christ was lord over everything in the same way. Doubtless there are many reasons why Kuyper failed in this task. However it is worth reflecting explicitly on how his methodology undermined his goal. Although Kuyper desired to construct a thoroughly Christian worldview Van Til admonishes him for, at times, being “the philosopher of culture, no longer depending on a careful exegesis of Scripture but giving free reign to his speculative imagination.”¹ We have seen how much of this “speculative imagination” was influenced by the cultural zeitgeist that he was actually attempting to defeat. We have seen how he was more than a little influenced by Romantic thought, Pantheism and

¹ Van Til, *Common Grace & The Gospel*, 228.

Evolutionsim. It is a sobering warning that a man who is above all remembered for his attempts to create a Christian worldview could have been so influenced in his view by “the world.” It will surely cause all Christians who, in Kuyper’s footsteps, hope to advance such a Christian worldview to proceed with prayerful humility.

2. Concerning contemporary application

We wondered in the introduction if Kuyper’s institute/organism distinction was a way of harmonizing a Two Kingdoms model with a Transformationist model regarding the mission of the church. A full investigation is outside the scope of this study. However, having critiqued Kuyper in some detail we are in a good position to make some brief comments. Keller, as we saw in the introduction, in employing the distinction, comes close to speaking about two missions: that of the church as institute and that of the church as organism. Moreover he countenances that Christians display Christ’s lordship by the formation of organisations separate from the institutional church to tackle endemic social or economic problems.² This he calls part of the organic church. He does not seem to say whether or not he thinks such institutions need to be linked with a specific local church. If he does, then we would welcome him making that explicit. If they are not and yet are still called organic “church”, then we would question whether he has done enough to guard against the trajectory inherent in Kuyper’s distinction to speak as if there are two churches and two plans of God (and the ensuing dangers as described above). Thus we wonder whether the distinction does enough to allay the fears of writers like DeYoung/Gilbert that the focus of evangelism and discipleship is lost once a Transformationist position is in view. Equally, having noted the tendency for Kuyper’s position, when pushed, to collapse into something resembling a Two Kingdoms model, there is no guarantee either that, just by employing the distinction, the objectives of the Transformationists will be met either. As it stands, the distinction as Keller uses it does not seem to offer a convincing way forward.

² Keller, *Center Church*, 294.

3. Concerning possible ways forward in the debate about the mission of the church

Finally, we offer some tentative thoughts about the implications of what we have seen for the debate about the mission of the church. And some even more tentative thoughts on possible ways forward.

If we reject Kuyper's institute/organism distinction it immediately becomes hard to ring fence evangelism and discipleship as the *mission* of the church unless we say that the sum total of Christian obedience is these two things. I don't think anyone would argue for that. One possible solution would be to drop the term *mission*, as used in this sense, altogether. In this way we would no longer be able to say that "this" subset of Christian obedience is part of the *mission* of the church whilst "that" subset is not. Rather we would have to say that wholehearted submission to Christ's lordship is what is demanded in all areas of life. Yet in terms of how the church prioritises its time, it would not be a level playing field or free-for-all. The reality of hell and the fact of salvation through Christ alone would mean that, in some sense, activities with evangelistic content are naturally self-selecting as areas of priority³ - but not because they are arbitrarily defined as *mission* whilst other activities are not.⁴

However, many people will feel that, even if Kuyper's distinction may not be the best way forward, there may yet be a distinction to be made. Keller himself hints at a

³ As John Piper has recently said "we exist to relieve all suffering. Especially eternal suffering!" The Gospel Coalition, "A Conversation: Tim Keller, John Piper, D.A. Carson (1 of 6)," n.p. [cited 1 June 2013]. Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=QzbSIQovq-0. 4'19".

⁴ In this vein the conservative evangelical community might well be served by revisiting what is often regarded as the "angels on the head of a pin" debate about infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism. If we cannot neatly package up the mission of the church, perhaps we will need to learn how to hold God's ultimate purposes in tension and what are proximate purposes. Van Til counsels, following Bavinck's lead, that holding the insights from both the infralapsarian and supralapsarian positions together might help with this. We are not to adopt an infralapsarian position such that there might feasibly be more than one plan of God (as ironically Kuyper the supralapsarian did), but nor are we to adopt a supralapsarian position such that everything becomes monolithically about the salvation of the elect without any appreciation for God's proximate purposes in showing blessing to elect and reprobate alike in this creation via common grace. Van Til, *Common Grace & The Gospel*, 220-221.

possible way forward by referring at one point to the “‘organic’ church dispersed.”⁵ Perhaps a better distinction would, indeed, be to talk of the gathered church and the dispersed church. The “gathered” moniker would focus attention on what happens when the church meets and would sit easily with a definition of what constitutes a true church as set out in, for example, the Belgic confession. The “scattered” label implies that the Christians to whom it refers are *at some point* gathered around word and sacrament. This might better guard against the scattered church ever defining itself apart from the gathered, whilst still carrying with it the expectation of Christian involvement in all of life. This is just one suggestion.

Whether this or other distinctions are pursued, our study of Kuyper and his distinction offers cautionary guidance on what methodology will need to be adopted. Firstly, and obviously, we will need to ensure that we allow the bible to define our terms and that we listen carefully to the full range and nuance of its description of the church. Otherwise we risk smothering its *metaphors* with our *model*. Secondly, we will be prayerfully aware of how easily our own thinking can be influenced by the cultural zeitgeist. This is all the harder to guard against for its imperceptible ubiquity. Perhaps it is the lauding of individualism over above communal commitments. Perhaps it is a suspicion of authority. Perhaps it is a pragmatic desire for efficiency and sound-bite answers to complex theological problems. All of these will need to be guarded against as we continue the discussion. Inter-denominational debate may well help. Perhaps those from a Free Church ecclesiology will be more aware of the dangers of losing the focus on the local church. Perhaps those from the Church of England with their conception of being involved in all the life of the parish will, intuitively, help look beyond the walls of local church.⁶

⁵ Trevin Wax, “Gospel, Culture, and Mission: An Interview with Tim Keller,” n.p. [cited 15 October 2012]. Online: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2012/10/10/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/>.

⁶ I am grateful to Peter Herbert and Dan Strange for this insight.

“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!’”⁷ That much remains true, and we pray for the Spirit’s help as the debate about how to articulate the church’s mission in light of that glorious truth rumbles on.

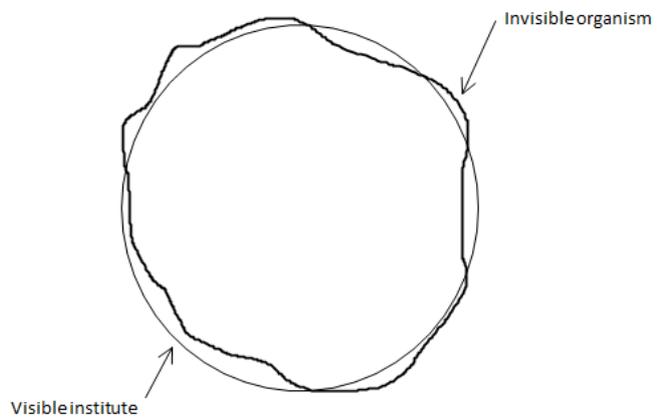
⁷ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in Bratt, *A Centennial Reader*, 488.

APPENDIX

For those who think visually these diagrams may be helpful in conceptualising the difference between Kuyper's earlier concept of the invisible organic church and his later concept of the visible organic church. These are clearly not meant to be authoritative but are, I think broadly indicative of how he conceived the organic church's relationship to the institutional in each case.

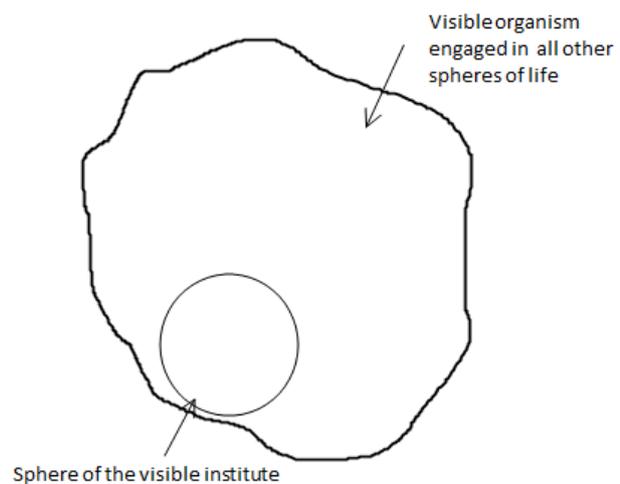
a) Invisible organic church

Here the invisible organism is contrasted to the visible institute. The organic is the essence of the church.



b) Visible organic church

Here the visible organism represents the activity of the church in all the other spheres of life outside the visible institute.



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