

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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We have seen the future, and we are not in it.

Peter W. Van Kleeck

Editor's note: Peter Van Kleeck is senior pastor of Wealthy Park Baptist Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A graduate of Grand Rapids Baptist College, he holds Masters degrees from Westminster and Calvin Theological Seminaries. In January he wrote to us giving a brief account of Charles Colson's lecture at the Calvin College Chapel on October 31, 1998. We asked Mr. Van Kleeck to expand the account for The Trinity Review. The editor offers some commentary on both Kuyper and Colson following Mr. Van Kleeck's report.

In the evening chill and rain that typifies Michigan autumns, my third son, Andrew, and I parked our car and hurried across the parking lot and up the steps to the main entrance of the Calvin College chapel. Calvin Theological Seminary and the Roman Catholic Acton Institute in Grand Rapids collaborated on a symposium titled "Over One Hundred Years of Christian Social Teaching: The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper and Leo XIII."

On the evening of October 31, 1998--Reformation Day, All Saints Day, or Halloween (depending upon your religious outlook)--Chuck Colson presented his lecture "Building Common Ground in the Christian Church for the Culture of Life." Among those bustling to find seats, my son and I located what we hoped would be an inconspicuous place to the right of the lectern. A handful of Roman Catholic priests milled about greeting those who had come, while a few Calvin Seminary professors shook hands with friends and acquaintances. Vietnamese Archbishop Van Trang, a cabinet member at the Vatican on the Commission of Peace and Justice (introduced as "Your Excellency"), was also present. There were about two hundred people in attendance, a relatively small number considering the name recognition and reputation of the speaker.

James De Jong, president of Calvin Seminary, introduced Colson by saying that without the help of Robert A. Sirico,

the priest who heads the Acton Institute, Colson would not have come; and De Jong thanked Sirico for using his influence to persuade him. Colson came to the platform to rousing applause and began his lecture by commending the seminary for a conference that brought together Calvinists and Catholics on the eve of celebrating the Reformation. Relating the 1994 release of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT) Colson said the message of the document was "something I believe in very deeply." He went on to commend the pope, saying John Paul II, a man he called the "Holy Father," would be known as "John Paul the Great," and he thanked the pope for his positive movement in bringing social change.

The theme of Colson's lecture was linking ECT with the Reformed tradition as expressed a century ago by the Dutch scholar and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Colson's intent was to show the existence of a historic Reformed basis for ECT and thus justification for continuing to build a Roman/Reformed consensus and apologetic for ECT and "The Gift of Salvation" (1997).

First stating the problem, Colson illustrated the moral decline of America both in contemporary culture and in the political arena. To be a fundamentalist or a separatist, which includes not engaging contemporary culture with the Bible, he said, is the "greatest sin." After thirty years of cultural autonomy and its dismal failure, he argued that it is time to identify with John Paul II and his statement that the new millennium will be a "springtime of the Christian faith." Evangelicals and Catholics together, according to Colson, have a historic opportunity upon the demise of humanism to join ranks and create a driving force for implementing world change.

Colson and Kuyper

At this juncture Colson referred to the Stone Lectures given at Princeton (1898-1899) by Kuyper.¹ Kuyper delivered six lectures, each revolving around the theme of necessary interaction between Calvinism and culture: “life-system,” religion, politics, science, art, and the future. Kuyper’s exhortation was that Calvinism, rather than being merely a theological or soteriological construct, should be *the* comprehensive and cohesive world-view employed in the struggle against any corresponding naturalistic worldview. The lectures were intended to describe Calvinism in such a way as to show its comprehensive nature and thereby present a truly unified Calvinistic worldview that could be advanced against modernism. He argued that modernism “is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature.”² The opposing worldview, Calvinism, is composed of “all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the ‘Christian Heritage.’”³

Colson’s lecture was free of pretense. Those who had ventured out on that blustery night had come to have their hopes of Roman Catholic/Reformed ecumenical unity confirmed with dogmatism and flair by its most articulate and popular advocate. But one of many inherent liabilities of ecumenical zeal is the zealots’ uncritical approval of their leaders. Indeed, facts and attention to details are the enemies of ecumenism, and these errors are compounded by the emotionalism that characterizes modern religious practice. Such was the case in Colson’s appeal to Kuyper.

Colson argued that Calvin Seminary and the Acton Institute are uniting against social and political ills because Rome, according to Kuyper, “stands on our side.”⁴ As Calvinism was considered less a sectarian theology and was developed among Protestants to be their governing worldview, Kuyper argued, then Protestants “might be enabled once more to take our stand, by the side of Romanism, in opposition to modern Pantheism.”⁵ Given the contemporary context, one might assume that Colson had a certain ally in Kuyper. However, Kuyper’s appreciation for Rome’s struggle against modernism was not a rejection of Reformation distinctives but “stemmed

from his close contact with Catholic social and political activity in the Netherlands, as well as his general acquaintance with developments within Catholicism in Europe in general.”⁶ Kuyper, unlike Colson, was not calling for ecclesiastical or theological synthesis. Peter Heslam observes that for Kuyper, “it was not his concept of the pluriformity of the church, therefore, that inspired the accommodating attitude towards Roman Catholicism he expressed in his final Stone Lecture, but his pragmatism in striving towards specific social and political goals.”⁷

Colson also neglected to say that Kuyper’s references to cooperation with Rome were expressed from the vantage point of Protestantism’s theological dogmatism and superiority to Roman Catholicism. It was Kuyper, not Colson, who said, “Undoubtedly on the points of ecclesiastical hierarchy, of man’s nature before and after the Fall, of justification, of the mass, of the invocation of saints and angels, of the worship of images, of purgatory and many others, we are as unflinchingly opposed to Rome as our fathers were.”⁸ After decrying the economic and moral depression of “Romanish countries,” Kuyper concluded, “Rome’s world-and-life-view represents an older and hence lower stage in the development in the history of mankind. Protestantism succeeded it, and hence occupies a spiritually higher standpoint.”⁹

Colson’s Millennium

Having omitted the “unflinching” elements of Kuyper’s thought, the substance of Colson’s lecture revolved around the redeeming value of common grace and Christians as social agents of common grace. If social change was Colson’s only goal to be achieved by calling both Protestants and Catholics to be good citizens, then appeal to Kuyper would have been appropriate, but such is not the case nor the goal.

It was no surprise that Colson, with all ecumenicists, referred to *John* 17:21, “that they all may be one” at the close of his lecture. Colson used Kuyper’s call for social action as the basis for his own call for ecclesiastical and theological consensus building. Protestantism’s greater strength in Kuyper’s day ensured, in his opinion, its ability to control the limits of Catholic/Protestant social interaction. But as the strength and convictions of Protestantism waned over the past century, the doctrinal self-discipline necessary to resist theological compromise

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered in the Theological Seminary at Princeton* (New York: Revell, 1898).

² *Calvinism*, 4.

³ *Calvinism*, 4.

⁴ *Calvinism*, 251-252. “Now in this conflict [against man’s subjective consciousness] Rome is not an antagonist, but stands on our side, inasmuch as she also recognizes and maintains the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Cross as an atoning sacrifice, the Scriptures as the Word of God, and the Ten Commandments as a divinely imposed rule of life.”

⁵ *Calvinism*, 15-16.

⁶ Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview* (Eerdmans, 1998), 235.

⁷ *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 236-237.

⁸ Kuyper, *Calvinism*, 251.

⁹ *Calvinism*, 255-256. See Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 234-237.

has likewise melted away. In today's subjective, religious malaise, social action has become so linked with theological compromise that Colson can speak of them as one thing. When social causes and theology become one, when theology cannot be separated from anthropology, the stage is then set for deified man to impose a kingdom, a final solution, diametrically opposed to the true church, Jesus Christ, and his Word.

Truth as Colson described it in this new millennium is reflected in the created and moral order of God's creation. Living in light of this external "truth," he said, gives us a rational, sensible life. With the reunification of Rome and Protestantism, Colson believes the true love of Christ for the world will be seen and the next millennium will be the "Christian century." Compromised unity makes the great work of confrontational evangelism to those who are "dead in their trespasses and sins" (*Ephesians* 2:1) no longer necessary. This new reformation, rather than being soteriological with justification as its focus, will be cosmological with a notion of religious sovereignty, indeed Roman Catholic sovereignty, as its theme. With an emphasis upon an external social and religious unity, Colson's new millennium eliminates *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*, disposes of freedom of conscience, and obfuscates the sovereignty of God in election, justification, and sanctification.

At the close of Colson's lecture, president Sirico of the Acton institute came to the platform for some closing remarks. Calling all in attendance "brothers and sisters in Christ," he said that alliances are formed on the basis of a "common faith in Jesus Christ." Sirico closed in prayer, and the meeting was dismissed.

In my Sunday morning sermon after this lecture, I told the congregation that I had seen Colson's future, and we are not in it. The greatest enemy of true spirituality and truth is self-imposed morality. While talk of mutually beneficial dialogue with Rome gives the spiritually challenged the impression that such beneficial dialogue is ongoing, it is not. Instead, we are witnessing the evangelicals' capitulating unilaterally to Rome in order to appear kind and loving, seeking to win the world's approval. They are abandoning both the Bible and the Reformation, rejecting justification as a judicial and covenantal declaration of God, and accepting apostasy as normative.

As we were leaving the chapel at Calvin Theological Seminary, my son Andrew remarked that we are pilgrims in an unholy land. With Abraham we are sojourners, looking "for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (*Hebrews* 11:10).

The Embarrassing Mr. Kuyper or Playing Politics—Pragmatism--Is Inimical to Christianity

John Robbins

Abraham Kuyper was a well-known politician in The Netherlands in the last quarter of the 19th century. Unfortunately, the political temptation distorted his vision and his recommendations for the future, just as it corrupts the theology of so many today.

In his last Stone lecture, "Calvinism and the Future," Kuyper said this of the Roman State-Church: "In one respect it [the naturalism of the 18th century] was an imitation of Calvinism, whilst in another respect it was in direct opposition to its principles. The great [French] Revolution [of 1789], it should not be forgotten, broke out in a Roman Catholic country, where first in the night of St. Bartholomew, and subsequently by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the Huguenots had been slaughtered and banished. After this violent suppression of Protestantism in France, and other Roman Catholic countries, the

ancient despotism [that is, the Roman State-Church] had regained its ascendancy, and to these nations all the fruits of the reformation has been lost.... Thus the French Revolution, by meeting violence with violence, crime with crime, strove after the same social liberty which Calvinism had proclaimed among the nations, but which had been attempted by Calvinism in the course of a purely spiritual movement. By this the French Revolution in a sense executed a judgment of God, the result of which affords, even to Calvinists, cause for rejoicing. The shades of DeColigny were avenged in the September murder of Maura's." So far, so good. The French Revolution should indeed be seen as the result of the Romanists making France half atheist and half Romanist in the 17th century.

But Kuyper, after making more comments indicating his acquaintance with the bloody and oppressive record of

Rome, went on to express ideas that have contributed to the apostasy of the churches he wanted to preserve. He was, for example, very impressed with “Rome’s warfare against Atheism and Pantheism.” Exactly what he had in mind, he did not say. Perhaps it was the pope’s Syllabus of Errors, which condemned all the errors of “modernity,” including Christianity.

Kuyper wrote, “A so-called orthodox Protestant need only mark in his confession and catechism such doctrines of religion and morals as are not subject to controversy between Rome and ourselves, to perceive immediately that what we have in common with Rome concerns precisely those fundamentals of our Christian creed now most fiercely assaulted by the modern spirit.... Now, in this conflict Rome is not an antagonist, but stands on our side, inasmuch as she also recognizes and maintains the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Cross as an atoning sacrifice, the Scriptures as the Word of God, and the Ten Commandments as a divinely imposed rule of life. Therefore, let me ask, if Romish theologians take up the sword to do valiant and skillful battle against the same tendency that we ourselves mean to fight to the death, is it not the part of wisdom to accept the valuable help of their elucidation?”

In this paragraph Kuyper reverted from Calvinism as a system, which, ironically, had been the whole import of his Stone lectures, to an anemic fundamentalism—the sort that treats justification and idolatry, for example, as something other than fundamental issues. Adding to this theological error, he proceeded to commit the fatal philosophical error of the 16th century: the acceptance of Romanist scholarship, instead of the development of a new Christian scholarship based on Luther’s revolutionary insight of the *Schriftprinzip*—the axiom of revelation. Calvin had developed theology on that principle, the principle of *sola Scriptura*, but no one of Calvin’s stature emerged to develop a consistently Christian philosophy. Instead, Romanist notions and philosophers—Kuyper mentions Thomas Aquinas with nothing but approbation in his last lecture—are embraced as allies.

Ah—what a diabolical trick. As an antidote for the poison of atheism and pantheism, we are offered the poison of Thomism and Romanist philosophy. On this point, Kuyper was as deceived by Rome as the poorest and most ignorant Spanish or Italian peasant.

Kuyper went on to say, “However highly, therefore, I may be inclined to value the inherent power of Roman Catholic unity and scholarship for the defense of much we also count sacred, and though I do not see how we could repulse the attack of Modernism save by combined exertion, nevertheless there is not the slightest prospect that the political supremacy will ever again pass into Rome’s hands....”

These statements reveal a peculiar blindness to the enduring evil of Rome. Our first question ought to be, Why should one value the inherent power of Roman Catholic unity? Its unity is organizational, ecclesiastical, not doctrinal. The political temptation was here clearly exerting its influence on Kuyper’s thinking. It is not organizational unity that is powerful, as the natural mind thinks it is, but the Gospel. The substitution of organizational unity for the whole counsel of God is the clue to what has motivated the ecumenical movement from Kuyper to Colson. The ecumenicists see organizational unity as the source of power—the means by which the world may be changed. They have all succumbed to the political temptation. There is a reason God warns us not to become entangled with the affairs of this world, not to regard ourselves as citizens of this world, but as strangers and aliens: It is to keep us from the political temptation: the notion that God’s kingdom is or can be advanced by our cooperation and alliance with persons and organizations that are not Biblical. It is time to re-read “The Grand Inquisitor.”

Second, Kuyper sees no hope in repulsing modernism except by a joint effort with Rome. This indicates that he thinks Rome is less dangerous than Modernism. (We shall not criticize him for not foreseeing that Rome in the 20th century would become modernist.) Had he held to the Reformers’ view that Rome is Antichrist, it is hard to see how he could have come to this conclusion. His final comments indicate that he did not believe Rome to be Antichrist, for “there is not the slightest prospect that the political supremacy will ever again pass into Rome’s hands.” One reason that Rome should be seen as an ally, Kuyper wrote, was that she is no longer a political threat. Not only was that not true one hundred years ago, but Rome’s political power has done nothing but grow for the past century.

Kuyper is an embarrassment to Christians because of his defection from the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, and his willingness to ally himself theologically, socially, and politically with those who do not believe Scripture. While Kuyper certainly saw the evils of Rome more clearly than Charles Colson does, his careless comments continue to offer modern men such as Colson a hook on which to hang their newly acquired cassocks.

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