

Christianizing
the **WORLD**

David J. Engelsma

Christianizing *the* **WORLD**

Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION

Jenison, Michigan

©2016 Reformed Free Publishing Association
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Scripture cited is taken from the King James (Authorized) Version

Reformed Free Publishing Association
1894 Georgetown Center Drive
Jenison, MI 49428
(616) 457-5970
www.rfpa.org
mail@rfpa.org

Cover and interior design by Erika Kiel

ISBN 978-1-944555-02-3
Ebook ISBN 978-1-944555-03-0
LCCN 2016936929

To Ruth

CONTENTS

- Preface 9
- Introduction to Part 1 11
 - Deep Background 12
 - Nature of the Book 16
- 1 The Kuyperian Common Grace Project 19
 - Christianizing the Culture 20
 - Remains of the Image of God 21
- 2 The Power of Christianizing the World 27
 - Common, Cultural Grace 28
 - The Internal Component: “Point of Contact” 33
 - Worldview 36
 - Breaching the Antithesis 39
 - Two (Antagonistic) Worldviews 43
- 3 Creedal and Biblical Basis of the Common Grace Worldview 51
 - Canons 3-4.4 52
 - “Neo-Calvinism” 55
 - Contemporary Creeds 57
 - The Covenant with Noah 59
- 4 Reformed Critique of Kuyper’s Common Grace Worldview: The Confessions 63
 - The Reformed Confessions 64
 - Grace and Providence 67

- 5 Reformed Critique of Kuyper’s Common
Grace Worldview: Scripture (1) 73
Calvin on the Noahic Covenant 74
Doctrinal Modernism 76
More on the Noahic Covenant 79
The Cosmic Character of the Covenant
with Noah 83

- 6 Reformed Critique of Kuyper’s Common
Grace Worldview: Scripture (2) 89
Colossians 1:13–20 89
The Worldview of the “Firstborn of Every
Creature” 95
A Christless Christianizing 102

- 7 The Cultural Calling of the Christian 109
Anabaptist? 109
The Reformed Worldview 111
Christianizing by Christ Alone 116
Last Warning 122

Introduction to Part 2 125

- 8 Answers to Questions 127

PREFACE

For many years, it has been widely accepted in Reformed circles worldwide that the theory of common grace developed by the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper and the project of Christianizing the world by this common grace, which Kuyper exhorted, are Reformed orthodoxy. Of late, this thinking spreads among evangelicals both in North America and across the world.

In the past few years, the Kuyperian dream (others would say “vision”) has captivated Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical scholars and institutions to the extent that they have made common cause with the Acton Institute, the essentially Roman Catholic organization in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to translate Kuyper’s three massive volumes on common grace from the original Dutch into English. The practical purpose of this scholarly enterprise is the Christianizing of North America and eventually the whole world.

Few, if any, question this quixotic (ad)venture with regard to its biblical and Reformed bases. Conservative and liberal Reformed theologians, scholars, churches, and seminaries alike enthusiastically endorse and promote the project and its theological foundation and source in a common grace of God.

This book examines the theory of common grace and its cultural ambitions in light of the Reformed creeds and holy scripture, particularly the passages of scripture to which Kuyper and his disciples mainly appeal. The book also calls attention to the deleterious effects of the theory of common grace upon the churches and schools that have adopted it and put it into practice. These well-known and prestigious

institutions include the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Free University of Amsterdam, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The conclusion, which one who honestly confronts the evidence can hardly deny, is that the emperor has no clothes. As a purportedly Reformed doctrine—indeed to hear its advocates it is one of the chief Reformed doctrines (rejection of which warrants exclusion from the Reformed community)—the theory of common grace has no parentage in the Reformed faith of scripture and the creeds. As a supposedly Reformed calling, Christianizing the world of the ungodly is not the legitimate offspring of Reformed Christianity.

The first and main part of the book is a much-expanded version of a public lecture given in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2014 under the auspices of the evangelism society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan. An important part of the expansion is the inclusion in the book of quotations and other references, with accompanying footnotes, which substantiate the book's analysis and critique. In a lecture, such material becomes tedious. In a book of this nature, they are necessary.

The second part of the book consists of questions raised by the audience at the conclusion of the lecture and of the answers by the speaker at the lecture (also the author of the book). Coming as they did from some who were hostile to the content of the lecture, as well as from others who, although supporters of the thesis of the speech, nevertheless desired more information or proof, these questions with the answers make for interesting reading.

The title of the book was shortened in keeping with contemporary conventions, if not so that it would fit on the cover. Originally, the title was *Abraham Kuyper's Common Grace Christianizing of Culture—Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?* Regardless of the title on the cover, this is the book's content.

INTRODUCTION TO PART 1

This book has both an immediate occasion and a deep background.

The immediate occasion is the ongoing translation and publication in English, for the first time, of the three volumes on common grace by Dutch Reformed theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920).¹ Significantly, the project of publishing Kuyper’s work on common grace is the cooperative effort of prominent Reformed theologians and churchmen and of the Acton Institute. The Acton Institute is a think tank that is heavily influenced by Roman Catholic theologians and therefore by the Roman Catholic Church. The co-founder and president of the Acton Institute is the Roman Catholic priest Robert A. Sirico. This cooperation of Reformed and Roman Catholic theologians and agencies is significant because Kuyper’s theory of common grace was intended by Kuyper to advance the alliance of Reformed and Roman Catholics in the Netherlands on behalf of his effort to Christianize the Netherlands and to propel himself into a position of political power.

The project of translating and publishing Kuyper’s books on common grace in English has an important spiritual, social, and practical purpose: the Christianizing of the culture of North America and eventually of the whole world.

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie* [Common Grace] (Amsterdam: Hovemaker & Wormser, 1902–4). Volume 1 is subtitled, in English translation, *The Historical Part*; volume 2, *The Doctrinal Part*; and volume 3, *The Practical Part*. The intention is to publish Kuyper’s original, three-volume work in nine volumes of English translation. The first three volumes of this projected series are now available. All quotations from that part of Kuyper’s work that has already been translated are taken from these volumes. Quotations taken from those parts of Kuyper’s *Common Grace* that remain untranslated are my translations of the Dutch original.

The opening paragraphs of the first volume of the English translation describe the program behind the translation project as “social reform” and “cultural engagement.”² The project is a sortie in the culture wars.

The source, the dynamic power, and the defense of this contemporary campaign by Rome and an odd alliance of evangelicals and Reformed thinkers to Christianize the world is Kuyper’s theory of common grace, which Kuyper proposed and developed most fully in his three large volumes titled *Common Grace*.

Deep Background

If this current project of translation and of the contemporary campaign to Christianize America and then the world are the immediate occasion of the present book, the deep background is threefold. First, in the early twentieth century, when Kuyper wrote his monumental work on common grace, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—Kuyper’s denomination of churches—bought into Kuyper’s theory of common grace and its cultural calling to Christianize the Netherlands and then the world. Kuyper, himself a virtually irresistible force in his churches, was aided in promoting the common grace program by his able, influential colleague Herman Bavinck. Although I will mostly mention and reference Kuyper in this book, I recognize that the highly esteemed Bavinck defended and promoted the common grace Christianizing of culture as enthusiastically and resolutely as did Kuyper.³

The Kuyper/Bavinck project of the early twentieth century is simply being replicated today, some one hundred years later, by their theological disciples and by institutions influenced by Kuyper and Bavinck. This replication includes cooperation

2 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: Noah-Adam*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian’s Library Press [Acton Institute], 2013), xi.

3 Cf. Herman Bavinck, “Common Grace,” trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 38–65. This article was originally Bavinck’s rectoral address at Kampen in December 1894. The Dutch title was “*De Gemeene Genade*.”

in the Christianizing enterprise by Calvinists and Roman Catholics. In Kuyper's day, it was the cooperation of Kuyper, his Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and Kuyper's Free University with the Roman Catholic priest and politician Herman Schaepman, Schaepman's Roman Catholic political party, and to some extent the Roman Catholic Church. Today it is the cooperation of Reformed theologian Nelson Kloosterman and other Reformed theologians of the Abraham Kuyper Translation Society, Calvin College, Fuller Theological Seminary, Kuyper College, Dorcht College, and Mid-America Reformed Seminary with the Acton Institute, which involves Roman Catholic theologians and necessarily, in view of the hierarchy of Rome, the Roman Catholic Church.

Therefore, we are warranted in asking the question, how did the Kuyper/Bavinck project of Christianizing the Netherlands in the early 1900s and subsequent years turn out? What were the effects on the Netherlands? Has that small country, with its sizable population of Reformed church members, been Christianized?

Yes, and what have been the effects of the Christianizing project on the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands? On the Free University of Amsterdam? On the theology and theologians influenced by Kuyper's cultural common grace? Are they all still soundly Reformed? Are they even Christian? Or has the Kuyperian Christianizing program actually turned out to be ecclesiastical suicide?

With these questions, the contemporary advocates of Kuyper's theory of the common grace Christianizing of culture do not concern themselves. About these questions, they are all studiously silent. To the obvious historical realities raised by these questions, they are blind.

But this is the first aspect of the deep background of the contemporary development regarding common grace that occasions this book: what has Kuyper's theory of common grace accomplished in his country and society, and what has the effect of the theory been on the churches and other institutions that embraced it?

A second aspect of the deep background is the repudiation of the entire common grace theory and its cultural program in the early 1920s by the young Christian Reformed preacher and theologian Herman Hoeksema. By synodical decision, in 1924 the Christian Reformed Church in North America adopted, and thus fully committed itself to, Kuyper's theory of common grace and its cultural, Christianizing purpose. The Christian Reformed Church made this decision in its adoption of the three points of common grace as binding church dogma. This dogma affirms that God is gracious to all humans without exception; that in this grace God restrains sin in all humans; and that by virtue of this common grace of God all humans are able to perform good works in the sphere of civil society.⁴

The fundamental doctrine expressed by the three points of common grace is that there is an important work of the grace of God in history that consists of making a society and eventually all the world Christian. As a work of the very grace of God in both unregenerated unbelievers and regenerated believers, this cultural work of God permits, indeed requires, the cooperation of Christians with the ungodly.

Having adopted this doctrine of common grace, at once the Christian Reformed Church disciplined Hoeksema for his public condemnation of the doctrine of common grace and its purported power of Christianizing American society. This was the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America as a distinct denomination of Reformed churches.

Both before and after the common grace decision of 1924, Hoeksema called the attention of the Christian Reformed Church and of the watching Reformed community of churches to the fact that the Reformed creeds teach absolutely

4 For the three points of common grace as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, in the original Dutch language, see the *Acta der Synode 1924 van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* [*Acts of Synod 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church*], 18 June to 8 July, 1924, held in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 145-47. For the three points in English translation, see Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1947), 84-86.

nothing about the supposedly fundamental doctrine of common grace, with its purpose and power of Christianizing the world. In addition, he warned that the doctrine, with its resulting practice, would make the churches that adopted the doctrine and practiced its teaching thoroughly worldly. That is, he warned that the adoption of the doctrine of common grace would prove to be ecclesiastical suicide.

This warning the Protestant Reformed Churches have continued to give right up to the present time, which renders these churches as unpopular with the Reformed community of churches as the prophets of the Old Testament were with national Israel.

With the sole exception of a brief notice of Hoeksema's objection to the theory of common grace in a footnote in Richard J. Mouw's introduction to the translated volumes of Kuyper's work on common grace—for which Mouw is to be praised, not only for doing full justice to the history of the adoption of the doctrine of common grace by the Christian Reformed Church, but also for indicating, no matter how faintly, a warning against the virtually uncritical acceptance of the theory by the Reformed community—the architects and advocates of the current common grace project completely ignore Hoeksema and his reasoned arguments and accurate warnings against common grace and its cultural pretensions.⁵

How strange! How strange this silence on the part of the Christian Reformed participants in this project and of their common grace allies regarding the voice of one who, at the time being one of their own and one known as an ardent disciple of Kuyper in all respects other than Kuyper's theory of common grace, said no. It is as though, after the flood, a learned group formed with the express purpose of repeating

5 Having referred to "the opponents of Kuyper's common grace theology within the Reformed tradition," Mouw, in a footnote, instances "Herman Hoeksema." Mouw refers the readers to Hoeksema's history of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America for "the texts of numerous documents dealing with debates about common grace in the Dutch Calvinist community, as well as his own extensive case against Kuyper's theology" (Richard J. Mouw, "Kuyper on Common Grace," in Kuyper, *Common Grace: Noah-Adam*, xxvi).

all the conditions on account of which the flood came and never mentioned Noah or his hundred-year warnings.

This aspect of the deep background of the contemporary venture concerning common grace makes the venture a matter of interest and, still more, of responsibility to the Protestant Reformed Churches. No other churches will, or are able to, expose the contemporary venture of Christianizing the world on the advice of Kuyper and by the power of Kuyper's common grace.

The third aspect of the deep background of the contemporary promotion of common grace and its cultural workings, as of this book, is less well known than the preceding two. This aspect concerns the background of Kuyper and Bavinck's own attraction to and promotion of the theory of common grace as a Christianizing influence on worldly culture. It concerns the theological thinking in Europe at the time that Kuyper and Bavinck produced their doctrine of common grace, indeed the theological thinking for some two hundred years prior to Kuyper and Bavinck. Out of this essentially modernist, that is, unbelieving, thinking rose the Kuyperian doctrine of common grace, which was then made binding dogma in the Christian Reformed Church by its common grace decisions of 1924. To this I return later, in my criticism of the common grace project.

Nature of the Book

In this book, I concern myself strictly, or almost strictly, as strictly as is possible, with Kuyper's theory of common grace *as a cultural doctrine*; as a teaching that accounts for the supposed doing of good, in the judgment of God, by unbelievers in the sphere of civil society; as a teaching that calls Christians to unite with non-Christians in making America and the world Christian. My subject therefore is those elements of the three points of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, and widely accepted by the broader Reformed and Presbyterian community of

churches, that consist of a favor, or grace, of God to the ungodly in everyday, natural life; of a restraint of sin in the unregenerate, so that they are not totally depraved, as otherwise they would be; and of the ability of the unbeliever, by this grace of God, to perform truly good works in the sphere of civil and cultural activities. The subject is the notion of a Christianizing of the world by a common grace of God that unites believer and unbeliever in the noble project.

In keeping with G. K. Chesterton's dictum that "any one setting out to dispute anything ought always to begin by saying what he does not dispute. Beyond stating what he proposes to prove he should always state what he does not propose to prove," I make clear at the outset what I do not intend to prove.⁶ I do not intend to prove that common grace always involves, or inevitably leads to, the heresy of universalizing the saving grace of God and therefore to the doctrine that the saving grace of God is resistible, dependent for its efficacy on the will of the sinner. This, I firmly believe.

The history of the Christian Reformed Church convincingly demonstrates this. Intending to affirm Kuyper's doctrine of a cultural common grace, the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 adopted as official church dogma the doctrine that God has a gracious desire for the salvation of all humans without exception. This is the teaching in the first point of common grace that God's grace toward all humans is expressed in a "general offer of the gospel."⁷ A grace expressed in an "offer of the gospel" is a (would-be) *saving* grace. A saving grace expressed in a "general offer" is a saving grace that fails to save many to whom God extends it and is thus identified as the universal,

6 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1994), 5.

7 For the Dutch original, see the *Acta der Synode 1924 van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*, 146. The Dutch speaks of "*de algemeene aanbieding des Evangelies*" as the expression of "*een zekere gunst of genade Gods*." The English translation is found in Hoeksema's *Protestant Reformed Churches in America*: "a certain favor or grace of God [expressed in]...the general offer of the gospel" (85).

resistible grace of Arminianism, which the Reformed faith condemns and repudiates in the Canons of Dordt.⁸

This I have argued in a book demonstrating that the Christian Reformed adoption in 1924 of a common grace of God has produced in that church the doctrine of universal atonement in the 1960s and the open denial of predestination in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹

But Kuyper contended that his common grace was essentially different from Arminianism's universal, saving grace and that it must not be confused with Arminianism's theology of universal, resistible grace. Therefore, I refrain in this book from charging his theory of common grace with inevitably opening the way in Reformed churches that embrace his teaching to the doctrine of universal, ineffectual saving grace.

I examine Kuyper's theory of a common grace of God that intends the Christianizing of the culture, or way of earthly life, of the world outside the church. The question I will answer is whether such Christianizing of the world by a common grace of God is the calling of Reformed Christians, as Kuyper urged, or ecclesiastical suicide.

8 Canons of Dordt 3-4.10-14, Canons of Dordt 2.8, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:589-91, 587. See also Canons 3-4.4, errors 1-9, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 167, 170-73. Schaff does not include the rejection of errors of the Canons in English translation.

9 See David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014).

The Kuyperian Common Grace Project

Let us first be clear as to what Kuyper and Bavinck and their theological and ecclesiastical allies and disciples had as the purpose or goal of their theory of common grace in the early twentieth century in the Netherlands. This is also the purpose of Kuyper's disciples in North America today with their translation of Kuyper's books on common grace and their promotion of the theology of common grace.

Kuyper wanted to influence the culture of his day. His elaborate theory of common grace was a cultural doctrine, in the service of a cultural project. By "culture," we should understand the earthly way of life of a nation, including not only morals, but also science, the arts, government, education, and family life. Roughly, by culture is meant what we have in mind by "everyday, earthly life in the world." In the theory of common grace, culture refers to all of life, apart from church life; all of life excepting public worship, doctrinal confession of the truth, prayer, and related spiritual activities.

Kuyper was convinced that the Reformed people in the Netherlands slighted culture and the cultural calling they shared with all Netherlanders. Indeed, he feared that the Dutch Reformed people of his day spurned culture and rejected the cultural calling altogether. Kuyper's code word

for this perceived evil was “Anabaptism,” with reference to certain Baptists in the time of the Reformation who withdrew physically from earthly society and tried to live in physical separation from the ungodly world. These Baptists cared only for the spiritual condition of their souls, or so they said. Not inaccurately, the Dutch Reformed adversaries of this conception of the Christian life summed up the thinking of these Baptists regarding the Christian life thus: “*met een boekje in een hoekje*” (“with a little [religious] book in a little corner”).

Kuyper charged that many Reformed believers restricted their calling as Christians to a good, active church life, ignoring and even repudiating an equally vigorous Christian life in society and in all areas of human culture.

Christianizing the Culture

Kuyper wanted to influence the culture in such an effective way as to make the culture “Christian.” He and Bavinck coined the term for this activity: “Christianizing” (the culture). Bavinck wrote, “We have to aim at that mighty, glorious, rich ideal to *Christianize* the world.”¹ He immediately added that this Christianizing of the world must be done “by bringing in our Reformed confession into all areas of life.” The modern Reformed advocates of the Christianizing project conveniently ignore this role of the Reformed confession in Christianizing the world. The Reformed confession is a hindrance to their cultural mission. The Reformed confession would certainly not promote cooperation between Calvinism and the Roman Catholicism of the Acton Institute.

By the Christianizing of the world, Kuyper and Bavinck did not mean that the life of a nation and ultimately of the entire world becomes truly Christian, that is, a life lived by at least a majority of humans who are born again by the Holy Spirit and believers in Jesus Christ. They did not have in

1 Cited in Willem J. de Wit, *On the Way to the Living God: A Cathartic Reading of Herman Bavinck and an Invitation to Overcome the Plausibility Crisis of Christianity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2011), 58; emphasis added.

mind a life of love for God and the neighbor from the heart, in accordance with the ten commandments of the law of God, even though this is the only life that is truly Christian. Not at all!

Kuyper was well aware that the majority of the citizens of the Netherlands were, and would always be, unregenerated, unsaved unbelievers, who did not love God nor keep the commandments out of love for God. But by Christianizing the culture of a nation, Kuyper meant a certain influence of Christianity on the culture, so that outwardly the everyday, earthly life of the citizens conformed somewhat to Christian standards. This external conformity to Christian standards could be described as Christian because the citizens, even though mostly unbelievers, had a certain regard for and delight in Christianity and its way of life.

On this crucial point, Kuyper himself must speak.

“Christian” [in the phrase “Christianizing the nation”] therefore says nothing about the spiritual state of the inhabitants of such a country but only witnesses to the fact that public opinion, the general mind-set, the ruling ideas, the moral norms, the laws and customs there clearly betoken the influence of the Christian faith.²

According to Kuyper, therefore, a Christianized nation is a society and nation that still lie in the darkness of idolatry, unbelief, and unrighteousness, but that have become more decent, moral, and orderly.

Remains of the Image of God

One might conclude that a Christianized nation in Kuyper’s thinking is one upon which a veneer of Christianity has been applied, were it not that Kuyper taught that Christianizing a nation also consists of a certain *inner* work of grace that improves the ungodly inhabitants of a nation and its ungodly

2 Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 199.

society *spiritually*. Especially does Kuyper plainly teach that common grace is a working of God within the ungodly that retains some real good, indeed part of the image of God in which man was created, in the unregenerated, depraved sinner. This account of his common grace appears especially in Kuyper's defense of common grace as a restraint of sin. This aspect of his doctrine of common grace makes common cause with the semi-Pelagian and Arminian error of the denial of total depravity and opens up his theory, indeed in history *did in fact* open up his theory, to the rank Arminian heresy of universal, ineffectual, *saving* grace.

According to Kuyper, common grace is more than "an external coercive force." On the contrary,

from within us it restrains the continued effect and the penetration of the poison of sin, so that it does not rob our whole life, all our inclinations, and all our capacities of all that God's image had imprinted on them...Common grace chose its base within our own heart for its outward working. Thus the small sparks [of the original image of God in man] still glow within us, small remnants are still noticeable there, and that is what common grace makes use of to restrain the madness of sin within us.³

Through common grace, "some embers [of man's original righteousness] continued to glow, and small remnants of that original goodness were spared."⁴ Apart from common grace, the fall of Adam would have resulted in the spiritual condition of total depravity. But "*common grace* intervened, and...through this common grace of God, sin was prevented

3 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: Temptation-Babel*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press [Acton Institute], 2014), 320. Bavinck agreed: "Traces of the image of God continue in mankind." The result is that "in the things which appertain to this earthly life, [fallen] man can still accomplish much good" (Bavinck, "Common Grace," 51).

4 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: Abraham-Parousia*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press [Acton Institute], 2014), 609.

from immediately bringing its poisonous, deadly work to full completion” [that is, to the condition of total depravity].⁵

As Kuyper himself observes, the implication of this doctrine of a common grace of God, indeed the purpose of it, is exactly the same as the semi-Pelagian heresy. The natural man, the unsaved world outside of Jesus Christ, is not totally depraved but retains some good—some *real* good, the very good in which God created Adam originally. Fallen humanity is not totally depraved. By this remaining good in itself, fallen, unregenerated, unbelieving humanity is able to perform the very good work of Christianizing society and ultimately the world.

The only difference between semi-Pelagianism and Kuyper’s theory of common grace is that semi-Pelagianism attributes the good that remains in fallen man to the limitation of the fall itself. The fall did not effect the total depravity of the sinner, merely a partial depravity. For Kuyperian common grace, the good that remains in all humans is due to the gift of a common grace of God. The effect is the same: the natural man is not totally depraved. He is yet somewhat good and is able therefore to do what is good in the sphere of earthly, everyday life. Ominously, this goodness of the ungodly, unbelieving world is the possibility, if not the necessity, of fellowship with the world on the part of Reformed, believing Christians, especially on behalf of cooperation with the world in Christianizing the world.

Kuyper himself acknowledges the essential similarity of his theory of common grace and of semi-Pelagianism, although his purpose is to promote his theory as a defense against semi-Pelagianism.

The doctrine of original sin, i.e., of the *total* depravity of our human nature, is again and again in danger of being weakened in a semi-Pelagian sense whenever we attempt to explain these “small traces” [of alleged remnants of the

5 Kuyper, *Common Grace: Temptation-Babel*, 312; emphasis is Kuyper’s.

image of God in fallen humans] on the basis of anything other than “common grace.”⁶

Both semi-Pelagianism and Kuyperian common grace deny that the fallen, natural man is totally depraved. Both doctrines affirm some remaining good in the unsaved sinner. Both proclaim that fallen mankind, outside of Jesus Christ, is able to accomplish great things with its remaining goodness. What distinguishes Kuyper’s view of the fallen race from the view of semi-Pelagianism is that Kuyper attributes the goodness of the natural man to common grace.

Another difference concerns the purposes of the semi-Pelagians and of Kuyper. Semi-Pelagianism wanted, and in its modern representatives still wants, to ascribe to the sinner a decisive role in his own salvation. Kuyper wanted to find in the ungodly world some capability for the forming of good culture, indeed for the Christianizing of the world, although in spite of his intentions, he also opened the way among his Reformed disciples to the semi-Pelagian doctrine of salvation. It was this zeal of “father Abraham [Kuyper]” for the Christianizing of society, the nation, and finally the world that moved the Christian Reformed Church to adopt its three points of common grace, although, like Kuyper, with the theory of a cultural grace of God toward and in all humans, they also adopted the semi-Pelagian and Arminian doctrine of universal, ineffectual, *saving* grace (the well-meant offer).

The zeal for Christianizing the world is alive and well in the Christian Reformed Church still today. In his August 2014 communication to alumni of Calvin College, the college of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, President Michael K. Le Roy held before the alumni the calling and prospect of the “transformational work of renewing this broken world.”⁷

6 Ibid., 320.

7 Michael K. Le Roy, “This Square Inch: Updates from Calvin College President Michael K. Le Roy” (August 2014). The missive is not paginated.

This is the mission of Calvin College, in keeping with the common grace decisions of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. This is the Kuyperian project of the alliance of Reformed theologians and the Acton Institute today.

To be noted in President Le Roy's call for a modern transformational crusade on the part of Reformed Christians is that the goal of the crusade is nothing less than "the world"—not Grand Rapids, Michigan, not the United States, not North America, not Amsterdam, not the Netherlands, but the entire, vast world.

The Power of Christianizing the World

It must be evident to all who are not out of their mind that the project of Christianizing North America, to say nothing of the whole world, in 2016 is a gigantic project. Putting Humpty Dumpty together again cannot hold a candle to President Le Roy's project of putting together again our "broken world."

This is not only because the vast majority of citizens are obviously hardened in anti-Christianity, developed in hatred for Jesus Christ and his godly kingdom and opposed to everything that even faintly resembles Christianity and Christianity's holy way of life. Think only of reforming and renewing the sexual culture of the United States, now having legitimized sodomy and lesbianism as a form of holy matrimony by decision of the Supreme Court of the land. A culture, a well-educated culture, decrees and practices such unnatural abomination only if it is being blinded and hardened by the curse of God according to his awful wrath—the very opposite of the common grace fantasy (see Rom. 1:18–32).

But the Christianizing project is huge also because, as Paul writes, Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and as John writes, "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19).