

***Christianizing the World: Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?* David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Hardcover. 192 pages. \$19.95. Reviewed by Craig Ferguson, a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.**

What a fresh and insightful book this is! As always, Prof. David Engelsma is thorough; in this case, his thoroughness is much to the chagrin of the (many) advocates of Kuyper's Common Grace Theory. Today we are witnesses to a sprawling, nebulous support for the idea of Christianizing the world, one which has seeped through the broader church world, crossing denominational lines, infecting a vast number with the vague conviction that, of course, it is the church's cultural mandate to so "build the kingdom of heaven." This development is the spiritual child of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, and has come to represent a kind of mad experiment which the broader church world has undertaken—some have undertaken it deliberately, others have joined in as unwitting followers.

In his most recent examination and critique of the Kuyperian call to Christianize the world on the basis of common grace, Engelsma is characteristically dogged and surgical. He begins as he means to go, illustrating first of all that common grace is not just some doctrine, but an entire worldview. Accordingly, its effect reaches throughout the life of both Christian and church, structuring our understanding of all of God's creation and all of that creation's history. On these bases, Kuyper's theory props up a lofty vision for the future, underpinned in every way by the common grace of God in working the Christianization of every culture, government, and people of the earth.

Immediately, then, Engelsma calls the reader to recognize the gravity of Kuyper's teachings and of their present-day manifestations. Kuyper did not intend for his theory to be a small attachment to the Reformed worldview and confession, and nor do his proponents today; rather, he brought it forward as a redefinition of the fundamental truths that make up the foundation of the Reformed Christian and Church.

The question, therefore, which Prof. Engelsma brings to our attention is aptly captured in the title of this work: "Is Christianizing the world a reformed calling or is it ecclesiastical suicide?"

Beginning with a thorough and fair representation of Kuyper's theory and of the logical conclusions of that theory which have been made by his disciples, Engelsma gives a pointed examination of the roots of Kuyper's doctrine. Are they to be found in the Reformed Confessions? Are they to be found in the doctrines of grace? Are they consistent with all of the teachings of scripture? What claims do Kuyper and his disciples make pertaining to the covenant? The antithesis? Particular grace? Engelsma's conclusion: "The advocates of common grace are foolish and blind, as well as theologically in error. The common grace project of Christianizing Western culture in the twenty-first century is sheer madness, as well as the breaching of the antithesis" (55). "The Kuyperian theory of common grace with the practice that accompanies it is ecclesiastical suicide! The proof is in the pudding" (107).

A uniquely enjoyable aspect of this volume is contained in the 8th chapter where Prof. Engelsma answers a number of questions which arose out of the speech when it was given. The author does not give any of them short shrift; he provides detailed and thoughtful answers, which also answer some of the more

pointed questions that may arise in the reader's mind. And the questions are good ones as well, certainly adding to the already substantial 'meat' of this work.

Make no mistake, this book makes excellent reading for shepherd and sheep alike! Though the author deals with (sometimes heavy) theological and doctrinal concepts, he does so in an exceptionally accessible manner. After all, this work began as a speech written for the edification of believers and it still maintains much of that voice. Recognize also, however, that this work is necessarily polemic; it is an examination of heresy, a denunciation of the same, and a declaration of a comforting, encouraging, scriptural truth.

For the Protestant Reformed reader, there is certainly a sense of events having come full circle with the publishing of this book. 1924 was a long time ago, but in the passing years we have seen common grace's rise to prominence in the broader church world. It is no longer merely dominant within the Reformed community, as it was then; today, it is dominant in all realms of those that call themselves Christian. In light of this, Kuyper's grandiose plans for the dominance of this teaching may seem to be realized.

But then, when we also consider the incredible, ever-increasing depravity of this wicked world, a world given over to sin, and the corresponding and increasing depravity of the broader, common-grace-dominated church world, the futility of Kuyper's "grand castle in the air" (64) is made abundantly clear.

The Lord preserves his church, as Engelsma notes, "the lovely rose amid the thorns," (69) called to holiness and antithetical purity, comforted in her calling to declare the truth in the midst of a wicked and ungodly generation. "The way of special grace is the way of friendship with God and of enmity with his enemies" (123).

I am very pleased to give this work my hearty recommendation.