

CALVINISM:
THE STONE
LECTURES

*Lectures on the L.P. Stone Foundation,
Princeton, New Jersey
on October 10th, 11th, 19th, and 21st, 1898*

BY ABRAHAM KUYPER

With an Introduction by Uriesou Brito

Published by Canon Press
P.O. Box 8729, Moscow, Idaho 83843
800.488.2034 | www.canonpress.com

Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: The Stone Lectures*
This Christian Heritage Series first edition copyright ©2022.
Introduction, copyright ©2022 by Uriesou Brito.
First published in 1899.

Cover design by James Engerbretson
Cover illustration by Forrest Dickison
Interior design by Valerie Anne Bost and James Engerbretson

Printed in the United States of America.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author, except as provided by USA copyright law.

CONTENTS

A Layman's Introduction <i>by Uriesou Brito</i>	vii
First Lecture: Calvinism a Life-system.	1
Second Lecture: Calvinism and Religion	37
Third Lecture: Calvinism and Politics	79
Fourth Lecture: Calvinism and Science	117
Fifth Lecture: Calvinism and Art.	155
Sixth Lecture: Calvinism and the Future	189

A LAYMAN'S
INTRODUCTION TO
LECTURES ON CALVINISM

The great Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, has shaped the political and religious scene in the Calvinistic world more than anyone since the sixteenth century. While the grandiosity of such a statement should shock us a bit, the sheer persuasive nature of this fine work should confirm my bold assertion. Indeed, Kuyper was an unbridled force of nature altering the landscape of discourse from the atomistic way of seeing the world, enhanced and propagated by the Enlightenment, to looking at the world through the distinct lenses of Trinitarian religion.

The Dutchman was born on October 29, 1837, in Maassluis, South Holland. He was educated by his father, Frederik Kuyper, who was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. His father was not the type to push orthodoxy on others. Instead, he held to a privatized faith, which his son, Abraham, would later strenuously oppose. Abraham's giftedness was astounding in many areas, particularly in

linguistics. In addition to the languages he already spoke, including English, French, German, and Dutch, he dedicated much of his time in undergraduate work to studying ancient languages. He avoided “distractions and pursued his studies with diligence.”¹

KUYPER’S CONVERSION AND RETURN TO CALVINISM

As he grew, Kuyper could not escape his father’s influence and became, as a result, enamored by modernist skepticism. One of the tenets of modernism is to prize human reason over authority. Kuyper reflected that he once joined in applauding a professor who denied the bodily resurrection of Christ. He would later say: “In the academic world, I had no defense against the powers of theological negation. I was robbed of my childhood faith. I was unconverted, proud, and open to doubting.”²

Kuyper was trained in modernist thought for seven years. His modernist philosophy impacted greatly his doctoral dissertation which compared Calvin to a modernist scholar. While the intention of his academic work was to diminish the relevance of Calvin, he would later reflect that it was the writing itself that caused him to consider the role of divine providence in history.

Nevertheless, that transition did not come suddenly. Kuyper was a gifted scholar with an incredible work ethic, even working himself into physical and mental exhaustion. He wanted to be a professor but could not pursue that goal due to a lack of funding. So, instead of pursuing academic work, he became a parish pastor. After marrying Johanna Hendrika Schaay, he took on his first pastorate in 1863.

1. James McGoldrick, *God’s Renaissance Man* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2000), 16.

2. McGoldrick, 17.

His congregation in the Dutch Reformed Church reacted strenuously against his modernist tendencies. They said his preaching and doctrine were unacceptable because they were not grounded in the Bible. This parish was unique in that, while the church scene in the Netherlands was entirely overwhelmed by liberalism and abandonment of the Reformed Confessions, this little flock challenged Kuyper's theological dispositions. Kuyper offered nothing new for those church members, but the same old liberal rubbish modernists produced. Some members even refused to come to church because their new pastor rejected the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions. Some parishioners would not allow Kuyper into their homes or even shake his hand.

Throughout his labors, the great scholar was, little by little, challenged by his humble, non-scholarly congregation. In a letter to a friend concerning that little church, Kuyper wrote: "The church's unremitting perseverance has become the blessing of my heart."³ Abraham Kuyper, the brilliant academician, found Christ again in the sweet display of piety amidst a faithful parish. He remained in that little flock for four years until 1867.

His reorientation to the roots of his Calvinistic faith was the genesis of a renewed zeal to apply the Lordship of Jesus to all areas of life. He was one of "the most energetic multitaskers"⁴ in the history of Christian thought. He founded and edited the newspaper, *The Standard*, which allowed him to contribute daily offerings of riveting journalistic prose. He also founded the Free University of Amsterdam, where he enriched his thinking by teaching theology and literature through a distinctly Christian worldview. When

3. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 56.

4. Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids: 2011), xx.

FIRST LECTURE

CALVINISM A LIFE-SYSTEM

A traveler from the old European Continent, disembarking on the shore of this New World, feels as the Psalmist says that his thoughts crowd upon him like a multitude. Compared with the eddying waters of your new stream of life, the old stream in which he was moving seems almost frostbound and dull; and here, on American ground, for the first time, he realizes how so many divine potencies, which were hidden away in the bosom of mankind from our very creation, but which our old world was incapable of developing, are now beginning to disclose their inward splendor, thus promising a still richer store of surprises for the Future.

You would not, however, ask me to forget the superiority which, in many respects, the Old World may still claim, in your eyes, as well as in mine. Old Europe remains even now the bearer of a longer historical past and therefore stands before us as a tree rooted more

deeply, hiding between its leaves some more matured fruits of life. You are yet in your springtide, we are passing through our fall—and has not the harvest of autumn an enchantment of its own?

But, though, on the other hand, I fully acknowledge the advantage you possess in the fact that (to use another simile) the train of life travels with you so immeasurably faster than with us—leaving us miles and miles behind; still we both feel that the life in Old Europe is not something separate from life here; it is one and the same current of human existence that flows through both continents.

By virtue of our common origin, *you* may call us bone of your bone—*we* feel that you are flesh of our flesh, and although you are outstripping us in the most discouraging way, you will never forget that the historic cradle of your wondrous youth stood in our old Europe, and was most gently rocked in my once mighty fatherland.

Moreover, besides this common parentage, there is another factor which, in the face of even a wider difference, would continue to unite your interests and ours. Far more precious to us than even the development of human life is the crown which ennobles it, and this noble crown of life for you and for me rests in the Christian name. That crown is our common heritage. It was not from Greece or Rome that the regeneration of human life came forth—that mighty metamorphosis dates from Bethlehem and Golgotha; and if the Reformation, in a still more special sense, claims the love of our hearts, it is because it has dispelled the clouds of sacerdotalism, and has unveiled again to fullest view the glories of the cross. But, in deadly opposition to this Christian element, against the very Christian name, and against its salutiferous influence in every sphere of life, the storm of modernism has now arisen with violent intensity.

In 1789 the turning point was reached.

Voltaire's mad cry, "Down with the scoundrel," was aimed at Christ himself, but this cry was merely the expression of the most hidden

SECOND LECTURE

CALVINISM AND RELIGION

The conclusion arrived at in my previous lecture, was first, that, scientifically speaking, Calvinism means the completed evolution of Protestantism, resulting in a both higher and richer stage of human development. Further, that the worldview of modernism, with its starting point in the French Revolution, can claim no higher privilege than that of presenting an atheistic imitation of the brilliant ideal proclaimed by Calvinism, therefore being unqualified for the honor of leading us higher on. And, lastly, that whosoever rejects atheism as his fundamental thought is bound to go back to Calvinism, not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as, suiting the requirements of our own century, may restore the needed unity to Protestant thought and the lacking energy to Protestant practical life.

In my present lecture, therefore, treating of *Calvinism and religion*, first of all I will try to illustrate the dominant position occupied by Calvinism in the central domain of our worship of the Most High. The fact that, in the religious domain, Calvinism *has* occupied from the first a peculiar and impressive position, nobody will deny. As if by one magical stroke, it created its own confession, its own theology, its own Church organization, its own Church discipline, its own cultus, and its own moral praxis. And continued historical investigation proves with increasing certainty that all these new Calvinistic forms for our religious life were the logical product of its own fundamental thought and the embodiment of one and the same principle. Measure the energy which Calvinism here displayed by the utter incapability modernism evinced in the same domain by the absolute fruitlessness of its endeavors. Ever since it entered its "mystical" period, modernism also, both in Europe and in America, has acknowledged the necessity of carving out a new form for the religious life of our time. Hardly a century after the once glittering tinsel of rationalism, now that materialism is sounding its retreat in the ranks of science, a kind of hollow piety is again exercising its enticing charms, and every day it is becoming more fashionable to take a plunge into the warm stream of mysticism. With an almost sensual delight this modern mysticism quaffs its intoxicating draught from the nectar-cup of some intangible infinite. It was even purposed that, on the ruins of the once so stately Puritanic building, a new religion with a new ritual should be inaugurated, as a higher evolution of religious life. Already, for more than a quarter of a century, the dedication and solemn opening of this new sanctuary has been promised us. And yet it has all led to nothing. No tangible effect has been produced. No formative principle has emerged from the imbroglio of hypotheses. Not even the beginning of an associative movement is as yet perceptible, and the long looked for plant

THIRD LECTURE

CALVINISM AND POLITICS

My third lecture leaves the sanctuary of religion and enters upon the domain of the state—the first transition from the sacred circle to the secular field of human life. Only now therefore we proceed, summarily and in principle, to combat the unhistorical suggestion that Calvinism represents an exclusively ecclesiastical and dogmatic movement.

The religious momentum of Calvinism has placed also beneath political society a fundamental conception, all its own, just because it not merely pruned the branches and clean the stem, but reached down to the very root of our human life.

That this *had to be so* becomes evident at once to everyone who is able to appreciate the fact that no political scheme has ever become dominant, which was not founded in a specific religious or antireligious conception. And that this *has* been the fact, as regards

Calvinism, may appear from the political changes which it has effected in those three historic lands of political freedom, the Netherlands, England and America.

Every competent historian will without exception confirm the words of Bancroft: "The fanatic for Calvinism was a fanatic for liberty, for in the moral warfare for freedom, his creed was a part of his army, and his most faithful ally in the battle."¹ And Groen van Prinsterer has thus expressed it: "In Calvinism lies the origin and guarantee of our constitutional liberties." That Calvinism has led public law into new paths, first in Western Europe, then in two continents, and today more and more among all civilized nations, is admitted by all scientific students, if not yet fully by public opinion.

But for the purpose I have in view, the mere statement of this important fact is insufficient.

In order that the influence of Calvinism on our political development may be felt, it must be shown for what fundamental political conceptions Calvinism has opened the door, and how these political conceptions sprang from its root principle.

This dominating principle was not, soteriologically, justification by faith, but, in the widest sense cosmologically, *the sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole cosmos*, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible. A *primordial* sovereignty which irradiates in mankind in a threefold deduced supremacy, viz., 1. The sovereignty in the *state*; 2. The sovereignty in *society*; and 3. The sovereignty in the *Church*.

Allow me to argue this matter in detail by pointing out to you how this threefold deduced sovereignty was understood by Calvinism.

First then a deduced sovereignty in that political sphere, which is defined as *the state*. And then we admit that the impulse to form

1. Bancroft, *History of the United States of America*, 15th ed. (New York, 1891), 1:319.

FOURTH LECTURE

CALVINISM AND SCIENCE

I n my fourth lecture allow me to draw your attention to the nexus between *Calvinism and science*. Not, of course in order to exhaust in one lecture such a weighty subject. Four points of it only I submit to your thoughtful consideration; first, that Calvinism fostered and could not but foster *love for science*; secondly, that it restored to science *its domain*; thirdly, that it delivered science from *unnatural bonds*; and fourthly in what manner it sought and found a solution for the unavoidable *scientific conflict*.

First of all then: there is found hidden in Calvinism an impulse, an inclination, an incentive, to scientific investigation. *It is a fact* that science has been fostered by it, and its principle demands the scientific spirit. One glorious page from the history of Calvinism may suffice to prove the fact, before we enter more fully upon the discussion of the incentive to scientific investigation found in Calvinism as such.

The page from the history of Calvinism, or let us rather say of mankind, matchless in its beauty, to which I refer, is the siege of Leyden, more than three hundred years ago. This siege of Leyden was in fact a struggle between Alva and Prince William about the future course of the history of the world; and the result was that in the end Alva had to withdraw, and that William the Silent was enabled to unfurl the banner of liberty over Europe. Leyden, defended almost exclusively by its own citizens, entered the lists against the best troops of what was looked upon at that time as the finest army of the world. Three months after the commencement of the siege, the supply of food became exhausted. A fearful famine began to rage. The apparently doomed citizens managed to live on dogs and rats. This black famine was soon followed by the black death or the plague, which carried off a third part of the inhabitants. The Spaniard offered peace and pardon to the dying people; but Leyden, remembering the bad faith of the enemy in the treatment of Narden and Harlem, answered boldly and with pride: if it is necessary, we are ready to consume our left arms, and to defend with our right arms our wives, our liberty and our religion against thee, O tyrant. Thus they persevered. They patiently waited for the coming of the Prince of Orange, to raise the siege, . . . but . . . the prince had to wait for God. The dikes of the province of Holland had been cut through; the country surrounding Leyden was flooded; a fleet lay ready to hasten to Leyden's aid; but the wind drove the water back, preventing the fleet from passing the shallow pools. God tried his people sorely. At last however, on the first of October, the wind turned towards the west and, forcing the waters upward, enabled the fleet to reach the beleaguered city. Then the Spaniards fled in haste to escape the rising tide. On the third of October the fleet entered the port of Leyden, and the siege being raised, Holland and Europe were saved. The population, all but starved to death, could scarcely drag themselves along, yet all to

FIFTH LECTURE

CALVINISM AND ART

In this fifth lecture, which is the last but one, I speak of *Calvinism and art*.

It is not the prevailing tendency of the day that induces me to do this. Genuflection before an almost fanatical worship of art, such as our time fosters, should little harmonize with the high seriousness of life, for which Calvinism has pleaded, and which it has sealed, not with the pencil or chisel in the *studio*, but with its best blood at the stake and in the field of battle. Moreover the love of art which is so broadly on the increase in our times should not blind our eyes, but ought to be soberly and critically examined. It presents the fact, which is in every way explainable, that artistic refinement, thus far restricted to a few favored circles, now tends to gain ground among broader middle classes, occasionally even betraying its inclination to descend to the widest strata of lower society. It is the democratizing,

if you like, of a life utterance which hitherto recommended itself by its aristocratic allurements. And though the really inspired artist may complain that, with the majority, piano-playing is mere strumming, and painting little more than daubing, yet, the exuberant feeling of having a share in the privileges of art is so overwhelming that the scorn of the artist is preferred to the abandonment of art training in education. To have laid a production of your own, however poor, upon the altar of art becomes more and more the characteristic of an accomplished civilization. Finally, in all this the desire of enjoyment through ear and eye expresses itself, especially by means of music and of the stage. And if it cannot be denied that many court these sensual pleasures in ways that are less noble and too often sinful, it is equally certain, that in many instances this love of art leads men to seek enjoyment in nobler directions and lessens the appetite for lower sensuality. Especially in our great cities, stage managers are able to provide such first-rate entertainments, and the easy means of communication between the nations imparts such an international character to our best singers and players, that the finest artistic enjoyments are now brought for almost no price within the reach of an ever-widening class. Besides, it is but fair to concede that, threatened with atrophy by materialism and rationalism, the human heart naturally seeks an antidote against this withering process in its artistic instinct. Unchecked, the dominating influences of money and of barren intellectualism would reduce the life of the emotions to freezing point. And, unable to grasp the holier benefits of religion, the mysticism of the heart reacts in an art intoxication. Hence, though I do not forget that the real genius of art seeks the heights of isolation rather than the plains below, and that our age, so poor in the production of real creative art, is deemed to warm itself at the splendid glow of the past; yea, though I admit, that the homage of art by the *profanum vulgus* must necessarily lead to art corruption,

SIXTH LECTURE

CALVINISM AND THE FUTURE

The chief purpose of my lecturing in this country was to eradicate the wrong idea that Calvinism represented an exclusively dogmatical and ecclesiastical movement.

Calvinism *did* not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a *life-system*, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a *life* and *worldview*, and such a one as was, and still is, able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life. It raised our Christian religion to its highest spiritual splendor; it created a church order, which became the preformation of state confederation; it proved to be the guardian angel of science; it emancipated art; it propagated a political scheme, which gave birth to constitutional government, both in Europe and America; it fostered agriculture and industry, commerce and navigation; it put a thorough Christian stamp upon

home life and family ties; it promoted through its high moral standard purity in our social circles; and to this manifold effect it placed beneath Church and state, beneath society and home circle a fundamental philosophic conception, strictly derived from its dominating principle, and therefore all its own.

This of itself excludes every idea of imitative repristination, and what the descendants of the old Dutch Calvinists as well as of the Pilgrim fathers have to do is not to copy the past, as if Calvinism were a petrefact, but to go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times and with the demands of the times to come.

This explains the subject of my final lecture: *a new Calvinistic development needed by the wants of the future.*

The prospect of this future does not present itself to us, as every student of sociology will acknowledge, in bright colors. I would not go so far as to assert that we are on the eve of universal social bankruptcy, but that the signs of the times are ominous admits of no denial. To be sure, in the control of nature and her forces, immense gains are being registered year by year, and the boldest imagination is unable to foretell to what heights of power in this respect the race may attain in the next half century. As a result of this, the comforts of life are increasing. World intercourse and communication are constantly becoming more rapid and widespread. Asia and Africa, until recently dormant, gradually feel themselves drawn into the larger circle of stirring life. Aided by sport, the principles of hygiene exert a growing influence. Consequently, we are physically stronger than the preceding generation. We live longer. And in combating the defects and infirmities that threaten and afflict our bodily life, surgical science makes us marvel at her achievements.