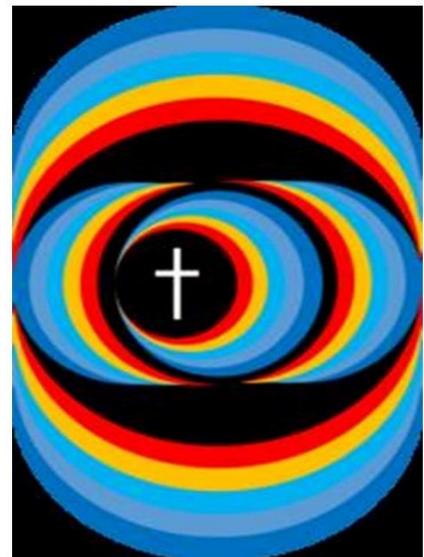


The Inside Out Church:

MOVING TOWARDS A disciple-MISSIONAL MODEL

The Inside Out Church is a church that balances the inside with the outside. What does that mean – balancing the inside with the outside? It is well understood that a church is a gathering of peoples who share the same faith, in the same God, and potentially share the same worldview. The church consists of people who gather inside a building, but who live outside of that building – they gather to worship Jesus Christ, but they scatter to live, work, and play in the world out there.

The Inside Out church seeks to give clarity to how and why we live, work, play, and worship the way we do. The pages you are about to read are a chapter excerpted from the full Doctoral Project book as written by Dale Melenberg. The first two chapters (3&4) utilized for this Study are chosen to reveal the worldly influences on our lives, in and out of the church. The next two chapters (5&6) will reveal the biblical impetus for how we are live our lives, in and out of the church.



Since these excerpts are taken directly out of the completed Doctoral Project, please know they are written to satisfy the academic standards for which they were intended. These chapter excerpts are supplementary to the Sermon Study Series and are not compulsory for reading before or after each study session. They are provided as additional resource only.

CHAPTER 4: DENOMINATIONAL FORCES THAT SHAPE FAITH

Distinctive Reformed Characteristics

The Christian Reformed Church in Canada belongs to a bi-national denomination in North America, hence the name, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Despite its allegiance to this larger body, it must be said that the CRC in Canada was more influenced by its Dutch roots than by its American neighbor. Before looking at that influence directly, it is best to describe the Christian Reformed overarching heritage and distinctive. The book, *On Being Reformed*, written by I. John Hesselink sets out to do just that, as well as correct some common misunderstandings. Hesselink seeks to explain “what the word Reformed really stands for,” . . . as it is “urgent that those of us within the Reformed tradition to re-examine our theological roots and review honestly our present state and prospects.”¹ Hesselink first corrects twelve common misunderstandings about the Reformed faith tradition, and then ends the book by spelling out five distinctive characteristics. Several of Hesselink’s descriptions about the Reformed faith and his five distinctives are helpful illustrations of the CRCNA.

The CRCNA which began in 1857 in the USA, finds its roots in its homeland church, which split from the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church of Holland – the state church) in 1834. Yet it is not so much the secession that marks the church as much as it is its ability to always be reforming. “*Ecclesia reformate semper reformanda est!*” was the Reformation cry—A Reformed church must ever be reforming itself—in accordance with the Word of God.”² The Word of God is what lies at the heart of the Reformed tradition, *Sola Scriptura*, as the great Reformation motto states.³ Biblical preaching [of the word of God] is one of the strengths of Reformed worship, where solid expository preaching is heard,⁴ and for the Reformed Christian it is the worship service and liturgy containing that Word of God that determines their faith and piety.⁵ Reforming then, for the Reformed member, is to be in constant vigilance of adhering to the Word of God—it is that Word of God which informs and shapes CRCNA life and faith.

The way one thinks about God, the way one does theology, affects not only the way they think about Christ and salvation, but also, if not more so, shapes one’s attitudes, piety, and life-style. There is, Hesselink says, a direct relation between arid, abstract, and doctrinaire theology and cold, lifeless, and negative Christianity. And admittedly so, ours has been a head, not a heart, religion, confesses Hesselink. The way theology is done has serious implication for personal faith and congregational life, yet deep within the heart of the [Reformed faith] is a profound piety, that is, a personal experience of

God linked to a passionate devotion to God.⁶ The experience of God within the Reformed tradition has been one of personal experience, personal as in private—between me and God. While a Reformed member could express their understanding and logic of God, they refrained from expressing love and devotion (emotion). And so it is that the Reformed faith finds itself fraught with the tension between being head and heart orientated. The Reformed heritage is one of lofty theology and experiential piety.

The CRCNA itself identifies these two traits of theology and piety, and adds a third, when it comes to describing themselves. The document/brochure, *What it Means To Be Reformed: An Identity Statement*, describes three emphases to being Reformed. The first emphasis is that of the *doctrinalist*, a strong adherence to certain Christian doctrines as taught in Scriptures and reflected in the confessions of the church. The second emphasis is that of the *pietist*, which refers to the Christian life and to one's relationship with God. The third emphasis is that of the *transformationalist*, which refers to the relationship of the Christian to culture, to a world-and-life view, and to Christ as transforming culture. "Obviously these three emphases are overlapping [but] they represent three distinct approaches, both historically and conceptually, and provide the framework for presenting the [Reformed faith]."⁷

The sovereignty of God is often the go-to answer when asked what it means to be Reformed, and this spoken in opposition to the free will decision of mankind.⁸ However, as Paul Jacobs states, "there is no contradiction between affirming that God is sovereign and that man is still responsible."⁹ This responsibility of man under the sovereignty of God is what provides the Reformed tradition its resilience to evangelize boldly and persistently.¹⁰ The CRCNA people have taken this responsibility to task, creating both home and foreign missions through a multitude of venues from on-the-ground missionaries to on-the-air radio and television broadcasts. The real purpose of Reformed missions was always to "magnify the sovereign, free grace of God," hence, the sovereignty of God leads to missions and evangelism leads to magnifying the sovereignty of God.¹¹

Despite the freedom of living responsibly under the sovereignty of God, there has also been a note of legalism that runs through the Reformed faith. Perhaps stemming from "the strict disciplinary measures which were enforced in Geneva, it is frequently assumed that Calvin's theology must be legalistic and lacking in any appreciation of Christian freedom and the joy of the gospel."¹² That note of legalism shows itself in liturgies, prescribed formularies by the denomination for conducting all aspects of worship and sacraments. The "air" or "feel" of these liturgies often portrayed a sense of constrictive and limited means of interaction between God and his people. The "every Sunday" reading of the Ten Commandments and the recitation of the Apostles Creed also added to the oppressive feel of legalism. Over time, this legalistic "feel" spoke louder than words and the people forgot that they were

free from the curse of the law and are now free to love and serve without fear and without compulsion.¹³ The purpose of freedom to live responsibly under God's sovereignty should ultimately be positive.

Covenant theology, strong within the CRCNA, is often blamed for the CRCNA's sense of pride and exclusiveness. The Covenant concept, resting on God's election, has promoted an air of arrogance—that they are the chosen ones, and with that an air of exclusiveness—that they are removed from the world. This pride and exclusion then leads to the perception that they are indifferent and/or opposed to so-called “worldly” realms of culture, economics and politics, and thus only concerned with the salvation of souls. To be Reformed though is to seek to bring the whole gospel to the whole world, it is not just a truncated version which applies only to the individual's spiritual welfare. However, when Reformed Christians espouse such narrow and negative views about the church's mission and relationship to the world they are betraying the best of their heritage. At its best, the Reformed tradition has promoted and held together a warm personal piety and high churchmanship with a fully-orbed concern for the world in its social and cultural as well as its economic and political dimensions.¹⁴ In this light, covenant theology is to be viewed as being in the world as a sign of the kingdom to the world, thereby assuming a much humbler status.

The Reformed faith is certainly shaped by its adherence to three mottos coming from the Reformation, namely, *sola scriptura*, *sola fides*, *sola gratia*. These three solas were intended to represent an important distinction compared with Catholic doctrine.¹⁵ However, Hesselink wishes to further distinguish that the Reformed piety, ethos, and approach to the world is distinctive from that of even other evangelical traditions. Five characteristics that Hesselink identifies are these: the Reformed faith is God-centered; they are People of the Word; their churches follow a Church Order; that their Doctrines are for a purpose; and that they hold a Life and Worldview; all five characteristics distinctive from other traditions. Briefly, these characteristics can be summed up in the five points. One, the doctrine of God is the doctrine of doctrines, in a sense the only doctrine. Two, although *sola scriptura* was a strong theme in the whole Reformation, it is in the Reformed tradition that scripture receives special prominence. Three, ecclesiology plays a prominent role in Reformed confessions, consisting in the fact that church order, church discipline, and the oversight of word and sacrament are all spelled out in Reformed ecclesiology. Four, there is a Reformed fascination with theology, an active, ethical thrust of Reformed thought that makes it practical and utilitarian. And five, the Reformed tradition transcends the individual and his salvation, it goes beyond the church and its body of Christ, it is concerned more

so for the realization of God’s will in the wider realms of the state and culture, in nature and in the cosmos, in short, Reformed theology is kingdom theology.¹⁶

Hesselink summarizes his thoughts on the Reformed tradition saying, “a vision of the sovereignty of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ manifest in every sphere of life, [is] a theology of the kingdom of God which transcends time and space—this is the grand design of Reformed theology at its best.”¹⁷ Certainly the CRCNA has benefitted from this Reformed theology and incorporated it into its traditions, which is why, as Hesselink points out, “it is important for members of any tradition to know their roots, [but] there is always the danger that the tradition, not the living God, will be glorified.”¹⁸ The Canadian arm of the CRCNA is in danger of having made such an idolatrous choice, despite how a key theologian’s influence in the Reformed tradition sought to influence their traditions.

Kuyperian Influences

The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (CGKN: Christian Reformed Church in Holland) broke away from the state church, the Dutch Reformed Church of Holland, in 1834 about the same time that Abraham Kuyper was born. The son of a rural minister of the state-run church, Kuyper grew up under the influence of both his father and the state church. But Kuyper would come to be a larger influence on the state and the church. Mark A. Noll provides a brief overview of Kuyper’s theology and influence in his Foreword to James D. Bratt’s biography of the life of Kuyper.

He [Kuyper] inherited the instincts of European Christendom, but was also committed to a heartfelt personal piety. He believed that the creation in its fullest extent was a gift of God beyond imagining and that Christ’s redemption extended to the uttermost reaches of that creation. He matched his confidence in the New Testament’s message of redemption in Christ with an equally firm belief that the Old Testament showed God’s intimate concern for family life, agriculture, politics, economic structure, warfare, international relations, and more. He was deeply committed to Sphere sovereignty, the belief that God had organized creation into discrete theatres of activity (family, business, art, education, church, state) with each one given specific purposes by the Creator and each possessing its own integrity. He held a positive conception of government, not as an all-purpose solution to every problem, but as the God-given “sphere” ordained to adjudicate disputes among other spheres, to defend the weak against the strong, and to maintain the state’s natural duties for developing

infrastructure and promoting the general welfare. At the highest level, he held both that God had gifted all humanity with the ability to contribute meaningfully to the common good (“common grace”) and that regeneration in Christ created a community, a mind, a predisposition, and a sensitivity utterly opposed to everything of the world (“antithesis”).¹⁹

It was this Kuyper, who held many offices throughout his life, and several at the same time, including (but not exhaustively): minister, schism initiator, editor of a daily newspaper, founder of a national political party, advocate for the funding of religious schools, founder of a university, a member of the Dutch parliament, and for a time the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. It was this Kuyper whose range of influence is noteworthy, who impacted the faith and life practices of the churches he founded, not to mention the whole state of the Netherlands. It was Kuyper, more than any other Protestant of the modern era, who succeeded at bringing together theology (especially creation and redemption) and life in the world (especially through the practice of *sphere sovereignty*).²⁰ It was Kuyper who influenced the members of the CGKN and the subsequent families that immigrated to Canada in the 1950s, families that would join to grow the Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

James D. Bratt’s biography does not aim to systematically treat any one piece of Kuyper’s thought or action, but rather to watch the various pieces of the whole emerge.²¹ Indeed, there are several pieces of Kuyper’s theology that have been influential in the shaping of the CRC in Canada, as well as some influence into the greater denomination, the CRCNA. Three theological aspects are noted here as having import to the life and practice of the CRC in Canada, namely Kuyper’s theology of Common Grace, Worldview, and *Sphere Sovereignty*.

Common Grace

John Calvin in his “virtue of the heathen” portion of the *Institutes* (II/3/3) posed the question, “How is it that the unbelievers in our midst often outdo many a child of Christ in their quiet, serious devotion to duty?” The answer to this question is posited by Kuyper. The doctrine of common grace sees the virtues of the unregenerate as fruits of the sovereign grace of God. This is not saving grace, Kuyper emphasizes, that went only to the elect by the operation of *particular grace*. Yet it was grace nonetheless, the unmerited favor of God, shed upon all people regardless of their spiritual destiny. Richard Mouw writes, “what Kuyper meant by common grace has to do with the kind of natural blessings that visit the redeemed and the unredeemed alike – the ‘common’ gifts that comes when the

Lord ‘makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.’ (Mt 5:45).”²²

On one hand, common grace exercised a bridling effect that restrained the natural outworking of sin. On the other hand, common grace portrays God as endowing the human race with abilities on purpose, and common grace was the means by which God’s intentions for the world was not thwarted by the fall.²³ Thus common grace was both a restraining and an empowering device that God deployed upon humanity that it might still flourish and live up to its original mandate, to “be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.” (Gn 1:28) Common grace, as it evolved throughout the CRC in Canada lowered the barriers between the sacred and the secular, thereby blurring the distinctions of us and them, between sacred and secular. It is questionable though, whether the church had an effect on the world where the members engaged, or did the secular effect the sacred. Common grace, by default leads to a lowered standard as it discovers its lowest common denominator.

Worldview

Where common grace gave Christians the opportunity to interface with people of other convictions, Kuyper’s Life and Worldview epistemology (worldview) provided the understanding of a collective consciousness, a solution to the dual questions of cultural authority and cultural coherence. “When our lives have been transformed by God’s grace, we see many things in new ways. And this seeing, guided by love, has profound implications [on our worldview]; how we view people and ideas and the products and processes of culture.”²⁴ Given the sense of crisis that culture had with the tension of authority coming from the battle between science and religion, Kuyper proposed Calvinism as the unifying worldview. Kuyper traced every worldview back to a single “fixed starting point,” a leading principle, by whose guidance the everyday world was explored, by whose logic a meaningful world was constructed.

Indeed, it was this common fixed starting point that gave people of faith the ability to converse with others in meaningful dialogue, as well it provided potential for a person of the faith to posit their claims in science as much as anyone else. “For all knowledge proceeds from faith of whatever kind,” Kuyper stated at the opening address of the Free University he founded. This knowledge and starting point also added coherence in the then rapidly changing world of knowledge. Kuyper’s worldview furthered the agenda of common grace. Where the CRC in Canada accepted common grace as the ability to see others as co-created humanity of God, Kuyper’s worldview spurred them to engage with those co-created and work alongside of them for the betterment of the world.²⁵

Sphere Sovereignty

The global stage in Kuyper's day saw an explosion of Western imperialism and the harbingers of a cultural revolution that would usher in a new form of modernism. Common grace and worldview epistemology afford the ease of cultural engagement, but a guiding principle was needed to direct the faithful in their thoughts and actions. Enter Kuyper's *sphere sovereignty*. "What Kuyper meant by a 'sphere' is pretty much what we have in mind when we talk about a person's sphere of influence."²⁶ Beginning from the starting point of Calvinism's sovereignty of God, Kuyper posited that God was sovereign over all facets of human life, and he insisted upon active Christian engagement in all facets. Kuyper believed that God had organized the creation into discrete theatres of activity, namely the spheres of family, business, art, education, church and state; each sphere given specific purposes by the Creator and each possessing its own integrity.²⁷ Despite modest biblical evidence and a minimum of theological elaboration, it was undoubtedly Kuyper's influence and subsequent history that carried the argument forward. Perhaps, Kuyper's memorable quote was enough to challenge the church into cultural engagement, "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!'"^{28 29}

Acknowledging the sovereignty of Jesus empowered the CRC in Canada to engage and promote cultural activities of the family, business, art, education, church, and government. The national efforts of the CRC in Canada over the past 60 years or so, since the mass influx of Dutch immigration, has seen many ministry initiatives engaged in the various spheres: three aboriginal ministries centres, a Citizens for Public Justice advocacy group, a Centre for Public Dialogue with the Government, a Diaconal Ministries Canada effort to coordinate the Canadian efforts of deaconate work, ecumenical activity with various organizations including Kairos, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, Service Link was setup to support volunteer efforts, a Christian Labour Association, not to mention the more churchly spheres of Christian World Relief activity, World Missions, and Home Missions. Each of these national ministries impacting their designated sphere where God has sovereignty, and the members engaging in each sphere to stake God's claim within each. Kuyper saw the role of Christians "to develop the potential endowed in creation as a service to God," and the CRC in Canada saw it come to fruition; "cultural engagement [was] a strategic priority for [Christ's] followers in the context of their times."³⁰ Kuyper's two key theological innovations, the doctrine of common grace and the worldview epistemology found their hands and feet of cultural engagement within the spheres of God's sovereignty.

The progression from common grace to worldview to *sphere sovereignty* is not hard to trace in the practice of the CRC in Canada, and as much as it flourished it has a dark side. Much of Kuyper's legacy, Bratt points out, has divided along two lines, as can be seen in the faith and life practices of the CRC in Canada. "Conservative heirs have amplified the themes of order, ontological fixedness, suspicions of secularism, and aspersions towards the Left. [While the] progressive progeny have followed his call for fresh thinking, epistemological openness, social justice, and aspersions towards the rich."³¹ This bifurcation of faith and life practices unknowingly engendered a divide in the CRC in Canada.

The conservative faith and life practices remained in the church, and the progressive faith and life practices ventured out into world; this bifurcation could be labeled as church and "parachurch" activities.³² The evidence of this is found in the proliferation of ministries and agencies of cultural engagement as listed above which the CRC in Canada has started since the influx of Dutch immigrants. The same proliferation of parachurch activity occurred at the local and regional level with the same flourish that the national level grew. Cultural engagement became the mode of the transformationalists, and the doctrinalists remained behind in the church. The institutional church, however was asked to fund the cultural engagement ministries, further enhancing the divide into those who-do and those who-pay. The pew member was removed from hands on ministry engagement as it was now in the hands of the professionals and specialists. The CRC in Canada exists with much heart and head activity, but the two are not connected.

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- ¹ John I. Hesselink, *On Being Reformed: Distinctive Characteristics and Common Misunderstandings* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1983) 2.
- ² “Often attributed to Calvin, the origins of the quote *Ecclesia reformate semper reformanda* is obscured in history.” Hesselink, 8.
- ³ “*Sola Scriptura*. That was the reassuring answer given to the insistent cry of men: Who shall teach us the truth, God’s truth, in the matter concerning our soul’s salvation? The very first words of Luther spoken before the world at large proclaimed this principle.” Theo Engelder, *The Three Principles of the Reformation: Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fides* in *Four Hundred Years*, ed. William H.T. Dau, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1916), 98.
- ⁴ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 26.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ⁶ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 31, 37, 38. This paragraph is adapted.
- ⁷ CRCNA, *What It Means To Be Reformed: An Identity Statement* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2002) 13.
- ⁸ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 94 “the [Reformed faith] affirms that man’s will is *not* free and that man does *not* take the initiative in response to the redemption offered in Jesus Christ.”
- ⁹ Paul Jacobs, *Predestination and Responsibility* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). As quoted by Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 39.
- ¹⁰ James I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967) 10.
- ¹¹ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 43.
- ¹² Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 51.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ¹⁴ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 63, 66, 67. This paragraph is adapted.
- ¹⁵ Four hundred years after the Reformation Theo Engelder writes that “these six words – sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fides – gave new life to the dying church ... and pronounced the eternal judgement on all who were bound to remain under the banner: Sola Romana.” Theo Engelder, *The Three Principles of the Reformation in Four Hundred Years*, 107, 108.
- ¹⁶ Hesselink, *On Being Reformed*, 95, 97, 103, 106, 109. This paragraph is adapted.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.
- ¹⁹ James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013) x.
- ²⁰ Bratt, xi.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, xxi.
- ²² Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 68.
- ²³ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, adapted from Bratt’s treatment on Kuyper’s theology of Common Grace, 197-199.
- ²⁴ Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 92.
- ²⁵ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, adapted from Bratt’s treatment of Kuyper’s Worldview, 204-207.
- ²⁶ Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 23.
- ²⁷ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, x.
- ²⁸ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 195.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, adapted from Bratt’s various treatments of Kuyper’s *sphere sovereignty* found throughout the book, x, 132-135, and 195.
- ³⁰ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 194.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, xix.
- ³² Parachurch Groups. Voluntary, not-for-profit associations of Christians working outside denominational control to achieve some specific ministry or social service. The prefix *para* comes from Greek and means “beside” or “alongside of.” The term became popular in the 1960s as a designation for various groups which were not only “alongside” but also supportive of more basic institutions. Reid, D. G., Linder, R. D., Shelley, B. L., & Stout, H. S., In *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).