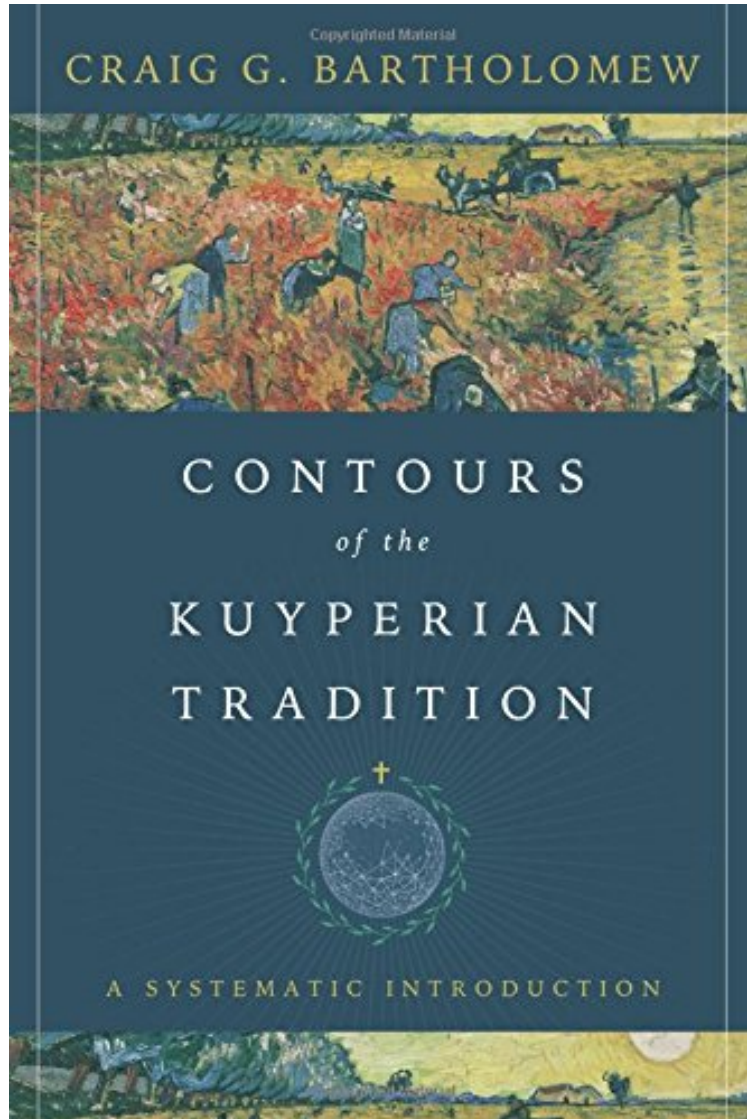


Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction

Craig G. Bartholomew
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Craig G. Bartholomew : Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Contours of the Kuyperian TraditionBy James B. PateCraig G. Bartholomew teaches philosophy and religion at Redeemer University College, which is in Ancaster, Ontario. His book, Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition, is about the thought of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Kuyper was a Dutch minister, a member of Parliament, and a prime minister. He also founded the Free University in Amsterdam.

Many Christians have quoted his statement that 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! Bartholomew not only explores Kuypers thought, but also the thought of some of Kuypers predecessors and successors. Here are some of my reactions:

A. A compelling part of the book was Bartholomew's narration of Kuypers conversion. Kuyper was initially a religious modernist, and he had an academic interest in religion, as he wrote a paper about John Calvin. Kuyper converted to Calvinist Christianity after reading a novel by an author who had Anglo-Catholic sympathies. This narration personalized Kuyper, and, although I lean more towards the liberal end of the religious spectrum, I found his conversion intriguing. Kuyper had an academic interest in religion, like me, yet he came to long for a transformed life.

B. Kuyper was a Calvinist, but he was not afraid to disagree with Calvinists, and he drew from other Christian traditions, as well. The novel that he read presented an Anglo-Catholic perspective on the church, and that influenced Kuyper to see the church as a mother. There are things that Kuyper said that many other Christians have said as well. For example, Kuyper, not surprisingly, favored a unifying perspective on Scripture to a fragmented picture, which historical critics posited. Kuyper resolved to trust Scripture, whatever its apparent problems. Kuyper did not believe in the divine dictation of Scripture but maintained that God shaped and used the experiences and personalities of the biblical authors such that they wrote what God desired. Kuyper desired a living, active faith rather than a dead orthodoxy. Not surprisingly, Kuyper held that education should go somewhere (i.e., provide wisdom and a larger picture of life) rather than merely passing down facts. Some of the details of Kuypers thought were not particularly interesting to me, since, as I said, other Christians have said similar things, repeatedly. But what was interesting was the eclectic nature of Kuypers thought: where Kuyper was a conservative, where he was a liberal, etc. And, occasionally, there were surprises. For instance, Kuyper had an open, yet critical, stance towards evolution, and Kuyper also stressed the importance of church tradition in theology as opposed to basing theology primarily on the first century church.

C. Some discussions in the book were of more interest to me than others. For instance, the criticisms of having a worldview that Bartholomew surveyed (by Barth, Bultmann, and others) struck me as nit-picky. I could see Bartholomew's response to them coming a mile away: a worldview is not necessarily bad, as long as it is done in a certain way. The discussion of the relationship between nature and grace could get arcane, at times, yet this issue looms large in Christian theology and is significant to understanding Kuypers thought, so Bartholomew did well to engage it. And Bartholomew summarized the different views on nature and grace concisely.

D. One chapter that gave me a slightly new (from my perspective) perspective was the one on missions. Bartholomew discussed J.H. Bavinck's view that God is at work in non-Christian religions (which are still non-saving), such that people in those religions seek God, even as they run away from God (à la Romans 1). When they seek God, that is a result of God's revelation and influence. I have heard elements of this idea before, but Bavinck put these elements together.

E. Parts of this book could have been better had concepts been illustrated more. How did Kuyper believe that church tradition should contribute to theology? How exactly did Kuyper think that belief in Christianity could contribute to learning rather than restricting it? Examples may have been helpful, assuming Kuyper himself provided them. There were also some apparent tensions within Kuypers thought that could have been ironed-out more effectively or saliently, assuming Kuyper himself resolved them. Kuyper was for religious freedom and against theocracy, yet he maintained that Christianity should guide the state, on some level. Bartholomew does well to explore how Kuypers thought can be relevant to modern or contemporary issues: South Africa, Christianity's relationship with Islam, etc. But, in my opinion, the book should also have engaged the relevance of Kuypers thought to contemporary questions of how (and whether) religion should influence politics. How does Kuyper compare and contrast with the religious right, for example? Such a discussion could have provided a crisper, more relatable description of Kuypers political ideology.

F. There was some historical context in this book, but not as much as I expected. Considering Kuypers love of William of Orange in *Our Program*, I was expecting a reference to him in Bartholomew's book, but I do not recall such a reference.

G. I read volume 1 of Kuypers *Common Grace* and Kuypers *Our Program*. How did Bartholomew's discussion of Kuyper compare to my amateur impressions? First, it was interesting that Bartholomew had a similar reaction to mine to Kuypers view that God will destroy and recreate the earth: that it did not fit neatly with Kuypers view that Christians should serve the earth because it is part of God's redemption. Second, in reading *Our Program*, I thought that Kuyper had a dimmer view of Islam than Bartholomew implies.

H. This book was variegated. There were parts that highlighted aspects to Kuypers thought that are similar to what many other Christians have articulated. There were parts that were arcane, yet informative and important. There were parts that were more personal and down-to-earth: Kuypers conversion story, Kuypers statement about the perspective missionaries should have when they approach people in other countries and cultures, Bartholomew's discussion of Christian ministries to the disabled, the Amish in light of Kuypers thought, etc. There were also some gems in the book: T.S. Eliot's beautiful statement about education and wisdom, and Lewis Mumford's statement about how the medievalists essentially turned Roman lemons into lemonade (he said that more profoundly and eloquently). I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. My review is honest!

Abraham Kuyper was, by any standard, one of the most extraordinary figures in modern Christian history. He was a

Dutch Reformed minister, a gifted theologian, a prolific journalist, the leader of a political party, the cofounder of the Free University of Amsterdam (where he was professor of theology), a member of the Dutch Parliament, and eventually prime minister of the Netherlands. Kuyper's remarkable legacy lives on today in the tradition of Dutch Calvinism that he developed. As his writings become more widely available, this tradition continues to find new adherents attracted by his comprehensive vision of Christian faith. But what defines the Kuyperian tradition? Renowned South African theologian and philosopher Craig Bartholomew has written the first systematic introduction to this tradition. Drawing on Kuyper's entire corpus, Bartholomew has identified the key themes and ideas that define this tradition, including worldview, sphere sovereignty, creation and redemption, the public square, and mission. He also goes beyond Kuyper to show how later thinkers developed these ideas. They include, among others, Herman Bavinck, J. H. Bavinck, Gerrit C. Berkouwer, and Herman Dooyeweerd. Widely known but little read, Kuyper is now receiving the global recognition that his fertile and influential thought deserves. *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* is an indispensable guide to one of the most significant schools of thought in the modern age.

"Abraham Kuyper's life and work merit close attention in our times, and *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* is an indispensable guide to this rich tradition and its contemporary relevance. Kuyper's labors ranged far and wide, and it can be easy to get lost in the complexity of this dynamic legacy. This volume provides a valuable introduction to these diverse efforts, clarifying and distilling Kuyper's wisdom for today." (Jordan J. Ballor, senior research fellow, Acton Institute for the Study of Religion Liberty, general editor of *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology*) "Abraham Kuyper began the neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands in the late 1800s as a way to make classic Christianity speak with fresh relevance to the modern world. Now, over a century later, Craig Bartholomew has given us this clear, thorough overview of Kuyper's original insights, their further development, and their relevance in the postmodern world. Both veterans of the movement and those new to it will find here a concise presentation of the distinctive Kuyperian themes—creation, worldview, and sphere sovereignty—as they characteristically unfolded in Christian education, philosophy, and political and cultural engagement. Best of all, Bartholomew lays out where Kuyperians can learn from others and how they might (and must) recover the spirituality and saturation in Scripture that animated Kuyper in the first place. Agree with Kuyper or not, this is the place to go to learn, in brief, what he said, did, and wrought." (James D. Bratt, author of *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*) "Craig Bartholomew numbers among the consummate insiders of the Kuyperian tradition, but he has written an accessible guide for the new and curious. Bartholomew presents the distinctive features of neo-Calvinism, such as its emphasis on worldview, sphere sovereignty, and structural pluralism, while also highlighting neglected dimensions such as its spirituality, concern for the poor, and focus on mission. Writing from a South African perspective, Bartholomew also does not shy away from criticizing the tradition when necessary. We've needed a contemporary theological introduction to neo-Calvinism for a long time, and *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* will undoubtedly become a standard textbook in this burgeoning field." (Clifford B. Anderson, associate university librarian for research and learning, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN) "This book provides a welcome introduction to a memorable Christian statesman who also happened to be a formidable theologian, a pious devotional writer, an ever-active journalist, and an important theoretician concerning Christian life in the world. Those who do not yet know Abraham Kuyper will find Craig Bartholomew a reliable guide, while those who have already encountered this 'flying Dutchman' will be pleased with the range and depth of Bartholomew's insights." (Mark Noll, author of *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*) "What do you get when one of the world's most masterful contemporary theologians engages in constructive and critical dialogue with one of history's most powerful and relevant theological traditions? You get Craig Bartholomew's *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition*. Bartholomew's interaction with Kuyper, Bavinck, Prinsler, Plantinga, and others is smart, accessible, and relevant to a broad range of interests, including public theology, systematic theology, philosophy, political science, education, and biblical theology. Highly recommended." (Bruce Riley Ashford, provost and professor of theology culture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) "Craig Bartholomew's study offers one of the best English-language interactions with Abraham Kuyper and neo-Calvinism that I know of. He transcends the often repeated and stereotyped key slogans and concepts. As he often relies on his personal fresh and independent observations, he addresses the reader with the persuasiveness of the established theologian. He succeeds in really connecting this tradition, which already existed in the nineteenth century, with today's world and problems, proving neo-Calvinism to be still very much alive. Everywhere the reader tastes Bartholomew's lively and appealing enthusiasm for the Kuyperian tradition, which he discovered already some time ago. At the same time, however, his book offers much more than just an overview or summary of that tradition. On the contrary, we receive an independent contemporary engagement with it that does not hesitate to generously use related accents from other traditions. Bartholomew's book illustrates the importance of Kuyper and neo-Calvinism but also offers an important and creative continuation of that tradition." (A. L. Th. de Bruijne, professor of ethics and spirituality, Theological University Kampen) About the Author Craig G. Bartholomew is H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy and professor of religion at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He is dean of the St Georges Centre for Biblical and Public Theology as well as adjunct faculty at Trinity College, Bristol. He has written and edited numerous books, including

Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics, The Drama of Scripture (with Michael Goheen), Old Testament Wisdom Literature (with Ryan O'Dowd), and a commentary on Ecclesiastes. He initiated and directed the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar, which now continues as part of the St Georges Centre.