Kuyper's Spirituality in Its Calvin-Context

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Abstract

This article explores Abraham Kuyper's spirituality by comparing it to that of John Calvin. Calvin's *Institutes* exhibits three dimensions of his spirituality in the context of the mystical union with Christ, namely, the affective character of this union, its effects and its significance for a correct estimation of the world. By comparison, Kuyper put a greater emphasis on the importance of the affections in mystical union because he gives more weight to the regenerated life. This focus also coheres with Kuyper's more optimistic approach to the Christian life, which contrasts with Calvin's emphasis on the need for daily justification. In Kuyper's approach the indwelling of the Spirit represents the union between heaven and earth, while Calvin stresses that God's future kingdom is beyond the here and now.

Keywords

Kuyper – Calvin – spirituality – mystical union – affections – indwelling Spirit

1 Introduction

Abraham Kuyper is well-known for his ecclesiastical and political activities, his theological views on common grace and non-Christian religions, his journey around the Mediterranean Sea, his founding of the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, his critique of Modernism, his theological treatises,¹ his *Lectures on Calvinism*² and his awareness of, and sensitivity to, social issues.³

To the 'kleine luyden' (the common people) of his time, he was also known for his devotional writings. It is telling that he continued to write meditations for *De Heraut* (a reformed church magazine that first appeared in 1850) when he was serving as prime minister between 1901 and 1905 and throughout the long journey he made around the Mediterranean in the following year.⁴ While delegating various tasks to others during these busy times, he continued to write the meditations himself. These Sunday-meditations were published in 1908 under the title *Nabij God te zijn (To Be Near Unto God)*.⁵ This commitment to devotional writings illustrates Kuyper's conviction that 'a Christianity that neglects the mystic element grows cold and congeals'.⁶ At his funeral in 1920

1 For example, A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, reprint of 1946), compare https://ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/holy_spirit/holy_spirit.i.html (accessed October 20, 2020).

2 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008).

3 A. Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty* (Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 2011). James D. Bratt collated Kuyper's key writings in his *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

4 A. Kuyper, *Om de oude wereldzee* 1–11 (Amsterdam, Van Holkema and Warendorf, 1907–1908); G. Harinck, *Aan het roer staat het hart. Reis om de oude wereldzee in het voetspoor van Abraham Kuyper* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2015). See also the eight episodes of the IKON-documentary 'Om de oude wereldzee', <https://tvblik.nl/om-de-oude-wereldzee> (accessed October 20, 2020).

5 Publisher Höveker and Wormser had already given instructions to publish this volume in 1906, but it was delayed due to the publisher encountering financial problems. In 1908 J.H. Kok at Kampen published it. The first translation in English was published in 1918 by Eerdmans-Sevensma in Grand Rapids as *To Be Near Unto God*, see 1908.21 and 1918.10–11 in <https://sources.neocalvinism.org/kuyper> (accessed October 20, 2020). For the historical context, see also James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 314–315, for its meaning, xxi, 375. G. Harinck wrote about the influence of the journey on the devotions, *Aan het roer staat het hart. Reis om de oude wereldzee in het voetspoor van Abraham Kuyper* (Amsterdam: Prometheus/Bert Bakker, 2015), 177–184.

6 According to Clay Cooke, 'Kuyper the mystic', <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/kuyper-the-mystic> (accessed October 20, 2020). Without the mystical aspect 'verdort het hart, het geloof verarmt, de liefde verkoudt, alle vrijheid gaat uit het wezen der vroomheid teloor, en men stoot zijn scheepke stuk op de klip van het wezenlooze Intellectualisme', *Drie kleine vossen* (Kampen: Kok, 1901), 66.

he was most fondly remembered for his mysticism.⁷ Underpinning his concepts of 'common grace', 'sovereignty in its own circle' and 'antithesis' was his devotional heart: the source of all his views and activities. In any reflection on the man Kuyper, attention to his spirituality cannot be overlooked.⁸

Kuyper wrote these meditations immediately after completing his critical comparative typology of religious approaches, *Drie Kleine Vossen* (1901), in which he advocated the integration of mysticism, the intellect and practice. Kuyper's position as prime minister and his travels provided a perfect context for exploring, and intermingling, a mystical religion with an active life. In a broader sense, *To Be Near Unto God* can also be understood as the adaptation of his more systematic theology, *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (1888–1889),⁹ into everyday experiential terms for his readership of very ordinary people.

Kuyper's spirituality in *To Be Near Unto God* has already been the subject of study. Clay Cooke has written a master thesis exploring his spirituality,¹⁰ and James Bratt has performed an initial analysis in his biography on *Abraham Kuyper*.¹¹ Kick Bras understands Kuyper as a protestant mystic,¹² Ad de Bruijne has investigated some characteristics of Kuyper's pietism and remarks that this sort of spirituality has been largely forgotten,¹³ while George Harinck has discussed Kuyper's final thirty meditations in the second volume of *To Be Near*

7 In the Dutch language, there is an instinctive difference between a mystic and mysticism. While mystic can be interpreted in a positive way, mysticism sounded to Kuyper like something negative in *Drie kleine vossen*. This raises the question whether we should use mysticism for his spirituality, nevertheless in the English translations and articles on this subject, this word is already in use.

8 For this reason, I cannot understand why Johan Snel omitted this theme from his *De zeven levens van Abraham Kuyper. Portret van een ongrijpbaar staatsman* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2020).

9 A. Kuyper, *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1888–1889), English translation: *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900).

10 Clay Cooke, "Be Near Unto God; Restoring Abraham Kuyper's Call for Mysticism as a Balance to Neo-Calvinistic Theology," unpublished master-thesis at Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

11 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper. Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, 314–319.

12 Kick Bras, *Een met de Ene. Protestantse mystiek van Abraham Kuyper tot Maria de Groot* (Vught: Skandalon, 2013), 17–42.

13 Ad de Bruijne, 'Midden in de wereld verliefd op God. Kuypers aanzet tot een neocalvinistische spiritualiteit,' in E.A. de Boer en H.J. Boiten (eds.), *Godsvrucht in geschiedenis. Bundel ter gelegenheid van het afscheid van prof. dr. F. van der Pol als hoogleraar aan de Theologische Universiteit Kampen* (Heerenveen: Groen, 2015), 441–453. Compare M.E. Brinkman and C. van der Kooi, *Het calvinisme van Kuyper en Bavinck. Teksten bijeengezocht en ingeleid door dr. M.E. Brinkman en dr. C. van der Kooi* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1997), 24–25.

Unto God.¹⁴ Hans Boersma's study concerning the beatific vision also reflects on Kuyper's spirituality.¹⁵

This contribution follows on from previous research. In order to come to a deeper understanding of Kuyper's spirituality, we will make a comparison with Calvin, especially in relation to his understanding of the mystical union. This is justified because Kuyper claimed that he represented overtly Calvinistic principles.¹⁶ It is well known and generally recognized that Kuyper made use of numerous elements of Calvin's theology, which he subsequently further developed. Both Calvin and Kuyper understood the Christian's responsibility to contribute to public life. The question that arises at this point is whether this relationship between Calvin and Kuyper also applies to their understanding of spirituality.

To answer this question, we must have a clear method of comparison between Calvin's and Kuyper's spirituality, since Calvin did not write explicitly devotional literature. Despite this, Calvin's *Institutes* have a spiritual character. According to the title of the first edition of the *Institutes*, this book 'summarises the main points of piety and everything that is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation, in particular for those who devote themselves to piety'. In every edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin repeated his conviction in the preface that the *Institutes* were written to 'be trained unto true godliness'.¹⁷ The opening sentence of the first edition of the *Institutes* was also repeated in the later editions from which it is clear that for Calvin, doctrine and spirituality were not isolated themes: 'Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and ourselves.'

For this reason, I draw an outline of Calvin's spirituality based on the third volume of his *Institutes* that commences with the subject of mystical union. After describing a number of key elements in Calvin's spirituality I subse-

14 G. Harinck, 'Met de telefoon onzen God oproepen, Kuypers meditaties uit 1905 en 1906,' in E.A. de Boer en H.J. Boiten (eds.), *Godsvrucht in geschiedenis. Bundel ter gelegenheid van het afscheid van prof. dr. F. van der Pol als hoogleraar aan de Theologische Universiteit Kampen* (Heerenveen: Groen, 2015), 454–465.

15 H. Boersma, *Seeing God. The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 338–353.

16 'All the apostles placed the emphasis on this; and, in their writings, the fathers of the Reformation, with Calvin in the lead, always referred to the mystical union with Christ as an indispensable factor in all true religion,' *To Be Near Unto God* 2.86.463 (volume, number of meditation, page). Kuyper preferred to call himself a Calvinist rather than a Reformed, compare James Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper. Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, xix–xxi, 46, 48, 69, 119, 171–172, 297.

17 Calvin, 'Prefatory Address', in the *Institutes*.

quently employ them as an interpretative framework for understanding Kuyper's approach in the volume *To Be Near Unto God*. This leads to some conclusions and considerations.

2 Calvin's Spirituality in the Framework of Mystical Union

Calvin starts the third part of the final version of his *Institutes* with the remark that we need the ingrafting into Christ himself to partake of his benefits.¹⁸ In this way, Calvin makes it absolutely clear that Christ's benefits are not isolated from Christ as a person. He also clarifies that we do not merely believe in Christ or are saved by Christ, but that Christ forms a spiritual union with us through the Holy Spirit. This starting point to understand the mystical union leads to three observations:

2.1 *The Affective Character of Mystical Union*

According to Calvin, religion is more a matter of affections than of the mind¹⁹ and more about assurance or piety than understanding.²⁰ The reformer speaks of the taste of God's goodness,²¹ and of immersing ourselves in the love of Christ.²² This taste provides unspeakable joy, 'when the feeling of the mind is overpowered, the tongue spontaneously breaks forth into utterance'.²³ This 'sweetness' is not an addition to faith, but is inherent to it.

This does not mean, however, that Calvin makes affections an distinct theme in his theology and spirituality for a number of reasons which relate to the framework of his theology. Firstly, because of the interpretation of the extravert character of faith, faith can also be opposite to inner feelings,²⁴ and is never without unbelief and doubt.²⁵

18 *Institutes* 3.1.1. Compare J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); J. Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder. A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

19 *Institutes* 1.5.9 and 3.2.8. Affections belong to the centre of soteriology, *Institutes* 2.1.9; 3.2.12; 3.2.36; 3.14.3.

20 *Institutes* 1.7.4; 1.10.2; 3.2.14.

21 *Institutes* 3.2.37. Compare CO (= Calvini Opera) 31:64–65 (Comm. Ps. 4:9). See also *Institutes* 1.13.13 and 3.6.4.

22 CO 51:188 (Comm. Eph. 3:18).

23 *Institutes* 3.20.33.

24 CO 31:712 and 714 (Comm. Ps. 77:4 and 8); *Institutes* 3.20.52.

25 *Institutes* 3.2.23; 3.2.26–27; 3.20.11–12; 3.20.17; CO 31:336 and 838–839 (Comm. Ps. 6:7 and 90:11).

Secondly, because of his classic anthropological understanding of the soul, the affections are considered hierarchically lower than the mind or the will.²⁶ Thirdly, because of his soteriology, Calvin emphasises the primacy of the benefits of the forgiveness and renewal which we receive in Christ, which implies that the fulfilment of our deepest desires in God is a secondary matter for Calvin.²⁷ Fourthly, this reserve about the fulfilment of our deepest desires in God is related to his view that we do not have direct access to God's essence, but we know God by the revelation of Himself in his works.²⁸ Fifthly, his reservation about the direct relationship with God is also motivated by Calvin's eschatology. Calvin treats the beatific vision as the *telos* (purpose) of the earthly pilgrimage where believers will enjoy true happiness.²⁹

Sixthly, Calvin does not make human happiness a starting point in his theology. This is apparent from his reply to Sadolet's letter to the Church of Geneva.³⁰ In this letter, Calvin states clearly that the heart of a Christian should lift itself higher than merely seeking personal happiness and salvation. Because we are born for God, God's honour must weigh upon our hearts above all else. When he writes that it is not theological to focus man on his salvation, he implies that it is too anthropocentric to put the search for happiness at the centre of spirituality.

2.2 *The Effect of Mystical Union*

In the third volume of his *Institutes* about the work of the Holy Spirit, Calvin develops several aspects of the Christian life commencing from the framework of mystical union with Christ. The second chapter in this volume treats faith, the third to the fifth chapter repentance, chapter six to ten the Christian life, chapter eleven to eighteen justification, chapter nineteen the Christian liberty, chapter twenty (the longest) prayer, in chapter twenty-one to twenty-four he treats election, and the final chapter deals with the resurrection of the body. In this way, Calvin explains that Christ's gifts are not isolated from Christ's person or vice versa, Christ's person is not isolated from the benefits in him.

26 R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 159–173.

27 In his commentaries on Ps. 16:6 and 73:25 we find traces of God filling the longings of human hearts.

28 'Hence it is obvious, that in seeking God, the most direct path and the fittest method is not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence, which is rather to be adored than minutely discussed, but to contemplate him in his works, by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us.' *Institutes* 1.5.9.

29 Compare H. Boersma, *Seeing God*, 257–278.

30 CO 5:391–392.

It is important to understand that lifelong communion with Christ implies the lifelong exercise of faith and repentance. In union with Christ, believers participate in Christ's death and resurrection, the sources for mortification and vivification.³¹ But there is resistance from the old nature:

We are so often enjoined to put off the old man, to renounce the world and the flesh, to forsake our lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Moreover, the very name *mortification* reminds us how difficult it is to forget our former nature, because we hence infer that we cannot be trained to the fear of God, and learn the first principles of piety, unless we are violently smitten with the sword of the Spirit and annihilated, as if God were declaring, that to be ranked among his sons there must be a destruction of our ordinary nature.³²

Calvin acknowledges the progress of the new man, but this progress is 'waver-ing and limping and even creeping along the ground'.³³ In this context, it is understandable that justification remains at the centre of the Christian life. In his *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet*, Calvin could write that removing the doctrine of justification implies that 'the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown'.³⁴ In a letter to Simon Grynaeus, he described the book of Romans as the key for opening the entire Scriptures because of the doctrine of justification.³⁵

In this context, it is important to bear in mind that, in Calvin's approach, justification is an continuing reality, because of God's daily wrath and his repeated acquittals.³⁶ In this way, Calvin accepts the paradox of *simul iustus, simul peccator* (at once righteous and a sinner). These dynamics of spiritual life reveal that Christians live from the absolute righteousness *extra nos* (outside us) of faith, and that focus on the contrasting aspect of the *in nobis* (in us) is always secondary and dependent on the *extra nos*.

31 *Institutes* 3.3.9.

32 *Institutes* 3.3.8.

33 *Institutes* 3.6.5.

34 CO 5:396–397, in *Institutes* 3.11.1 Calvin says that justification is the most important pillar of religion.

35 CO 10:403. See also Calvin's introduction to the book of Romans, CO 49:1.

36 *Institutes* 3.4.12; 3.14.10; 3.20.37.

2.3 *The Estimation of the World*

Calvin's interpretation of the *unio mystica cum Christo* (mystical union with Christ) also has implications for the manner in which he views this present world.³⁷ Calvin rejects an approach of contempt for this present life or living an ascetic and disinterested lifestyle. The reformer cannot be accused of holding the opinion that believers are redeemed from this world without having any view of the redemption of this world. In particular, Calvin's theocratic aspirations reveal that he felt a duty towards this present world.³⁸ Nevertheless, in his evaluation of this world, Calvin expresses that relative to the enjoyment of God, this world is to be held in contempt. This view flows from the believers' union with Christ and his participation in the new creation which implies that he is a stranger and pilgrim in this world.

This led Calvin to write the chapters on need to meditation upon the future life and concerning the use of this world. According to Calvin, contempt for this world means that we only use this world as long as it does not hinder the future life, but rather it promotes our pilgrimage to heaven.³⁹ His fundamental conviction is: 'If heaven is our country of abode, what can the earth be but a place of exile?'⁴⁰ Therefore, the reformer can also state that a Christian believer longs for the day of his death and the day of the resurrection of the body.⁴¹ The following reference reveals Calvin's approach:

Hence it follows, that they who desire to be happy in the world renounce heaven (...) But if we were honestly and firmly convinced that our happiness is in heaven, it would be easy for us to trample upon the world, to despise earthly blessings, (by the deceitful attractions of which the greater part of men are fascinated,) and to rise towards heaven. For this reason, Paul, with the view of exciting believers to look upwards, and of exhorting them to meditate on the heavenly life, presents to them Christ, in whom alone they ought to seek perfect happiness; thus declaring, that

37 Compare for a broader treatment of this issue W. van Vlastuin, *Be Renewed. A Theology of Personal Renewal* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 113–122.

38 H. van den Belt has shown that Calvin's understanding of the active role of the government developed during his lifetime, 'The Exegetical Background of Calvin's View of the Government', in H. van den Belt (ed.), *Restoration through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 83–94.

39 *Institutes* 3.10.1.

40 *Institutes* 3.9.4. C. van der Kooi has treated this in his 'Life as Pilgrimage: The Eschatology of John Calvin', in H. van den Belt (ed.), *Restoration through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 185–198.

41 *Institutes* 3.9.5.

to allow their souls to grovel on the earth would be inconsistent and unworthy of those whose *treasure is in heaven*.⁴²

3 Kuyper's Spirituality Compared to That of Calvin

How does Kuyper's spirituality relate to Calvin's? In light of the preceding observations concerning Calvin, we will consider the framework of Kuyper's theological spirituality. Just as for Calvin, for Kuyper the mystical union with Christ was a central reality in the Christian faith and in spirituality. In his earlier work on the Holy Spirit, he understood the mystical union to be 'an organic connection, uniting the Head and the members in a (for us) invisible and incomprehensible manner'.⁴³ Kuyper elaborates on the reality of the mystic union with Christ in three chapters: 'Implanting in Christ', 'Not a Divine-Human Nature', and 'The Mystical Union with Immanuel'.⁴⁴ We can also discover the presence of the mystical union with Christ in his devotions in *To Be Near Unto God*.

3.1 *The Affective Character of the Mystical Union*

According to Kuyper, mystical union is deeper than our consciousness. He uses the imagery of a mother having communion with her child on the breast, even though the little baby is not aware of it.⁴⁵ In the same way, God has fellowship with believers even in their sleep. This mystical union achieves its goal in reciprocity:

It is not merely His work, but a grace inherent in His Person, and so identified with Him that the apostle exclaims: "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification?" It is related to the unio mystica: He vitally in us, and we vitally in Him; He the Vine, and we the branches: It is not I that live, but Christ liveth in me; He the Head, and we the members. All these indicate the vital union between the believer and the Mediator. The unborn child may be said to breathe through the mother's breath, and the mother to breathe in the child. The same is true here, although the comparison illustrates, but does not exhaust the matter.⁴⁶

42 CO 45:205 (Comm. Matth. 6:21).

43 A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 124.

44 A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 322–337.

45 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.85.457–462.

46 A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 458.

It is striking that this English translation does not accurately reflect the affective language of the original Dutch.⁴⁷ The English translation has, in fact, flattened all the affective and lyrical language of astonishment and wonderment, language which lies at the heart of the mystical character of the spiritual union with Christ.

On the one hand, Kuyper rejects intellectualism, false mysticism and practicalism, but he acknowledges healthy and true mysticism.⁴⁸ In *Drie kleine vossen* he explains that false mysticism expects new revelations, makes people with inner light proud, despises the Word of God, destroys the church and leads to obscenity because the mystical aspect of spiritual love is mixed with the mystical aspect of sexual love.⁴⁹ In *To Be Near Unto God* he extends this distinction between true and false mysticism when he criticises mysticism divorced from Christianity in Spiritism, Theosophy and Buddhism where the 'Man of Sorrows' is absent.⁵⁰ But even when Christ is present, there can be a false mysticism that 'has begun to interpret religion altogether, or nearly so, from the work of redemption by Christ, in connection, of course, with personal experience of grace', but without doctrine.⁵¹

In true mysticism the heart, the will, the intellect, the imagination and actual deeds are all included, while the inner experience, at the same time, exceeds these human faculties.⁵² There is something of the immediate touch of God, by which God's Spirit unites Himself with our spirit without us losing our own personality; it is above all rational understanding and is inexpressible. Writing about this touch of God's love, whereby the believer is overwhelmed by the love of God, Kuyper says: 'The Song of Songs describes this ecstasy of love, and aims to sketch an image of the love of the soul for God. The whole Scripture stretches the canvas on which at length the Song of Solomon embroiders the image in

47 The original Dutch has no question mark after 'sanctification' and after 'unio mystica' is written: 'd.w.z. aan die gansch geheimzinnige, geheel ondoorgrondelijke gemeenschap, waarin een kind van God met zijn Immanuel bestaat. Ééne plant met Hem'. After 'members' we read in Dutch: 'Of wat anderen vorm van uitdrukking gij uit de Heilige Schriftuur nemen wilt! Het is al aanduiding van dat ééne wondere, onbegrijpelijke mysterie, dat een kind van God één leven met zijn Middelaar leeft'. After 'child' we read in Dutch: 'en één hartebloed beider leven draagt', *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (Kampen: Kok, 1927), 575–576.

48 Kick Bras' chapter on Kuyper can be seen as his evaluation of the mystical approach, *Een met de Ene*, 17–42.

49 *Drie kleine vossen*, 66.

50 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.106.585.

51 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.10.49.

52 Kuyper treats this mystical love in several meditations, *To Be Near Unto God* 1.27–41.

vivid colors.⁵³ Kuyper also explains that this 'Ecstasy of love' is to be valued positively as it is 'a high-strung degree of affection which takes the person whom it masters out of his normal self and transports him into an ecstatic state of mind, which although is certainly not insanity, it shows elements that are similar to it'.⁵⁴ Perhaps this description comes closest to expressing the mystery of the experience of God's nearness:

This is not the mysticism of imagination. It is not knowing God by the acts of the will. Neither is it knowing God through the analytical studies of confessional standards. It is the close approach to God with the warm, tender feeling of the throbbing heart that craves to be cherished; it is to have longed and languished for what can quiet the burning desires of the heart; to have tried everything that can be tried; to have suffered disappointment with it all, and now at last to find the true, perfect and holy object of the love of the heart; to receive God himself in the soul; and in this love to be supremely happy.⁵⁵

Kuyper considers this experience as the essence of eternal life: 'It is to love, and in this love itself to enjoy eternal life (...) Until in the hereafter every wall of separation shall fall away, and God in us and we in him shall be the perfection of highest Love.'⁵⁶ The exercise of love is closely related to the exercise of praise in which we adore God in an affectionate way.⁵⁷

If we compare Kuyper's approach to Calvin's understanding, we see continuities in the overarching approach. Kuyper speaks the same language with Calvin concerning the reality of mystical union with Christ, about the affective character of this union, and that it is the source of spiritual life. Within this broad agreement we also discover important differences. The reformer of the sixteenth century spoke about the knowledge of God through his works, but the reformer of the nineteenth century spoke about an immediate communion with God.⁵⁸

53 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.35.183.

54 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.35.182.

55 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.35.185–186.

56 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.35.187.

57 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.91.493–497.

58 'And the seeing of the only begotten Son of the Father which nurses the faith, feeds and every time refreshes it again, is such conscious fellowship of soul with the Lord of glory, that in and through him, the Eternal Being himself is reached, and, spiritually seeing the son with the eyes of the soul, the child of God knows himself to be one with the Father,

While the reformer of the nineteenth century focuses on the mystical affections *in nobis* as such, Calvin's focus is different.⁵⁹ While Kuyper seeks the raising of our affections through music in worship to approach nearer to God,⁶⁰ Calvin is reserved about the use of music in public worship. The differences between Calvin and Kuyper are also related to Kuyper's emphasis on the indwelling of the Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is especially related to our affective life, because the Spirit 'becomes the source of all our holier and higher emotions, sensations and impulses'.⁶¹ In Calvin, affections are part of the framework of paradoxical faith, which is not present in the organic concepts of Kuyper. While Calvin's spirituality recalls the brokenness and need we find in the Psalms, Kuyper's spirituality is reminiscent of the intimacy of the book of Song of Songs.⁶²

This aspect also bears relation to the interpretation of the beatific vision. Calvin positions the beatific vision mainly after this present life and although Kuyper also acknowledges that we will only see God's glory in the life to come, he attributes more place for enjoying God's glory in this life.⁶³ Because Kuyper acknowledges that the eschatological life in the soul of believers begins in this life, happiness is extensively treated in his approach.

3.2 *The Effect of the Mystical Union*

The following citation from Kuyper reveals important key aspects of his understanding of the effect of the mystical union:

the Son and the Holy Ghost' *To Be Near Unto God* 2.72.389–390. In our prayer, we do not seek God's gifts, but God himself, 2.59.320.

59 Kohlbrugge blamed the Canons of Dordt for this focus on *in nobis*, W. van Vlastuin, 'Dort Outwitted by the Remonstrants. Kohlbrugge's Evaluation of the Canons of Dort', *Church History and Religious Studies* 99 (2019), 228–247.

60 'Organs and stringed instruments therefore are not secondary, but indispensable factors in worship, a means ordered of God for fuller enjoyment in his praise and adoration; that through the world of music, too, the soul may come closer to God', *To Be Near Unto God* 2.61.329.

61 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.62.335. The indwelling of the Spirit is treated in the meditations about Ps. 51:13 and 1 Kor. 3:16, 2.82 and 2.83. Kuyper explains that the indwelling of the Spirit is richer than God's gifts or the mutual communion with God, because it is the immediate presence of God in our personality.

62 It is significant that Kuyper was under the influence of the holiness movement, J.D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 87–108. Kuyper forsook this connection and tried to pursue its purposes with a more orthodox Reformed alternative.

63 Compare Hans Boersma, *Seeing God*, 352.

The soul's nearness to God and our "mystical union with Christ" belong together (...) The temptation to which, alas, so many yield, of staying on Golgotha, and of there [sic] closing off their account with Christ, kills the faith (...) But in his conversation nothing is heard of a closer, tenderer relation of the soul to Christ. In the utterances of his spiritual life nothing is perceived that refers to it. He is now saved, and that is the end of it. This, however, is nothing but self-conceit. Nothing but spiritual egotism is at play in this. Escape is sought from eternal punishment; one wants to insure himself for eternal salvation. But there is nothing indicative in this of thirst after the living God; nothing of the child's longing for his Father's house; nothing of sacred jealousy for the honor of God's name. And from this, no spiritual power can proceed. No religion can operate in, nor go forth from, this. And what is more, it cannot be true, that in this wise Golgotha can bring propitiation for the life of the soul. The Gospel does not preach this. It does not explain the atoning sacrifice to us in this way. The Scripture never attributes the power of salvation to Golgotha, except as the mystical union binds our inner life to the life of Christ. It must be a being buried with him in his death, in order to rise with him unto life.⁶⁴

Kuyper and Calvin both agree that the benefits of Christ cannot be isolated from mystical union and that mystical union transforms our lives, but they differ in the specific outworking of this union. According to Kuyper, mystical nearness is the purpose of the mystical union, according to Calvin, mortification of the old nature is a lifelong struggle for the believer.

Calvin and Kuyper both understand the importance of union with Christ's death and resurrection, but they approach it in a different way. According to Calvin, the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection coexist in the whole of the Christian life, whereas according to Kuyper, the effect of Christ's resurrection follows on from the effect of Christ's death in the Christian life. While the emphasis in Calvin is on the mortification of the old nature, Kuyper's emphasis is on the quickening of the new nature. We can also say that Calvin emphasizes the stubbornness of the old nature, while Kuyper is more optimistic about the possibilities of the new nature.⁶⁵ This extensive citation is important for an

64 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.86.463–464.

65 C. Augustijn correctly evaluates that Kuyper's ideal was a church of spiritually-mature people who accept God's promises and make visible God's kingdom, 'De spiritualiteit van de dolerenden', in C. Augustijn and J. Vree (eds.), *Abraham Kuyper: vast en veranderlijk. De ontwikkeling van zijn denken* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), 183–199, here 185.

understanding of Kuyper's view on the progress of the Christian life and spirituality:

Not to continue standing where we stand, but going on, and going on ever further (...) It is all one course of triumph and victory for those to whom the lack of such light would mean eternal night, but it is a growing light, that ever rises higher, and at every moment becomes brighter; and Christian life would be worthless in this world, if the eye of the soul, as it gradually becomes accustomed to [the] stronger light of grace, did not obtain thereby an ever clearer insight into the riches of God's mercy. This brings a threefold growth. Growth in inner strength; growth in the more effective exhibition of the powers of the kingdom; and growth in fellowship with God, which is the heart of all religion. There is growth in inner strength through the fuller strength imparted from the heavenly kingdom. The night is far spent, and light shines ever more clearly in the soul. God shows this favor in the personal life. Increasing brightness in our personal skies. Less night and more day in which ever more and ever clearer light is sown on our pathway. As an effect of this inner growth, there is greater exhibition of power. He who must travel in the early dawn makes little headway, but when clearer daylight illumines the way he quickens his pace (...) For as long as light and darkness strive for mastery in the soul, there is continual hesitancy and slipping of the foot. But with more light there comes more moral courage. We become more animated, we become more bold in holy undertakings, and more light shines out from us upon others. Instead of tottering, the step becomes firm; instead of work half-done, labors are finished and made perfect. Nor is this all. For however far we may be developed along moral lines, development in piety is more significant, and the rich gain which the clearer shining of heavenly light brings, is the growing tenderness of our fellowship with God.⁶⁶

66 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.63.338–339. Initially believers exercise communion with God once a month, but it grows to daily communion with God and ultimately we exercise it even during the night, 2.66.357. Believers grow from outward knowledge of God to a deeper spiritual knowledge: 'This provisional outward knowledge of God leads of itself to the more intimate fellowship of the Lord, whereby gradually the full, rich knowledge of the perfection of God is attained, which is eternal life', 2.67, 359. See also 2.70.376–379. In his meditation about Ps. 84:4 'From Strength to Strength', Kuyper explains that our spiritual life grows in accordance with the growth of organisms, 2.75.401–406.

The religious presence of God in the soul, affects Christian communion and leads to Christian activities that overcome the rule and lure of the world within us, personally and collectively:

The Lord is then not only close to the heart, but he is in the midst of us. He is the common center of all our interests and the tie that binds us together. It is then not merely a pious frame of mind but a godly life, a consecrated purpose, and zealous cooperation from which that holy activity is born, which in every department of life overcomes the world and makes virtues to go out, which are not from us, but which flame out in us from him who walks in the midst of us, because he is the source of our light, of our strength and of the inspiration of our life.⁶⁷

Also here, the indwelling of the Spirit is the hidden power of the Christian believer and the driving force of his courageous activities:

What is the secret of the courage and power that overcomes in the case of these heroes and heroines? Of course, they excelled themselves, that is to say, they knew how to apply a power of will, which really far outreached their own strength. This high power comes not from without, but from within; from their fixed heart, from their soul taking hold of itself, from the spirit that is in them (...) But even as such muscular tension can spring from evil excitement and overexertion of the spirit, so by an inner tension of the Holy Spirit the soul can double its strength, yea, increase it three-fold times.⁶⁸

It is telling that Kuyper, after having been voted out of the government, wrote about the 'great power of will' and 'giant effort' to work for 'better times'.⁶⁹

67 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.65.351–352. Christians fight every sin, 2.95.514–520.

68 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.69.272–273. Compare 2.76.411: 'If, on the other hand, in the inner chambers of your heart you are bold, heroic and determined in your stand of bitter hatred against your sinful inclinations, as against your mortal enemy, the heart may remain full of impurities until death, but you are pure of heart, and by God's grace you triumph again and again over the sin that attacks you in the heart. Then Satan is not your tempter, but God is your confederate. Then the struggle which is never given up brings you the closer to God, and in the midst of battle there are moments when, with the vision of the eye of the soul, you see, as it were, your God.'

69 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.73.294.

Although Kuyper is critical of Methodism's activism which tends to overlook justification by faith,⁷⁰ in his devotions, it is clear that the justification of the ungodly by faith has no place in Christian spirituality, let alone a central place. This is very different from Calvin's position. In Kuyper's spirituality we see a once-for-all justification as the basis for the Christian life that follows, while in Calvin's theology and spirituality the paradox of *simul iustus et peccator* is fundamental. Although Calvin does not deny a once-for-all justification,⁷¹ his spirituality focuses on the ongoing justification that functions in the midst of the chastenings of the law. While Calvin's Christian has to be obedient to God, because of his accent on the status of justification Kuyper can lay more stress on the duties of believers.⁷²

Kuyper's approach is related to his interpretation of union with Christ within the framework of his spirituality. According to Calvin, Christ's righteousness remains central in Christian spirituality, but Kuyper emphasizes that Christ as Mediator is the starting point for the dynamics of the spiritual life which is directed toward God the Father:

If however, our mystical union with Christ shall maintain its true religious character, and not degenerate into sentimental Christolatry, this relation to Christ must never be taken as an end in itself. Christ is the Mediator, and there can be no Mediator except for the sake of making our approach to God possible. To be near unto God, in sacred confidence to feel oneself to be close by God to live here on earth in nearness to God through faith, and once, after death, to serve God eternally in the Father's house above—that is and remains the end and aim; and everything the Scripture reveals to us regarding the Mediatorship of Christ, must result in this, and can never rest in itself. Once Christ himself shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, then God may be all in all. He who stops short with himself, or has no further desire than to be numbered with God's people, arrests spiritual progress in his own soul.⁷³

70 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.29.152. Methodism denies the 'gentle stillness', 2.89.481.

71 *Institutes* 3.17.5 and 10.

72 We find the word 'must' 353 times in *To Be Near Unto God*. The word 'moet' is found 447 times in the Dutch translation. Although the word can be used in several senses, it remains an indication of the duty of believers. What is telling is the difference of interpretation of Psalm 73:23 about continually being with God. According to Kuyper, this refers to the believer's decision to seek God after spiritual declension (*To Be Near Unto God* 2.57.309), while Calvin applies these words to God's faithfulness in our unfaithfulness, CO 31:354 (Comm. Ps. 73:23).

73 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.86.465. Compare 1.10.49. See also 1.19.109: 'In Immanuel we have

The implications of these theological differences for the understanding of spirituality are great. While Calvin's spirituality can be typified as Mediator-centered, that is living by faith from a salvation which is outside of ourselves, Kuyper's spirituality is much more focused on the inner life of the soul and active service for God.

3.3 *The Evaluation of the World*

Whilst Kuyper emphasizes the mystery of the mystical life with God, at the same time, he is apprehensive of dualism and deism. He says, therefore, that we have to walk and abide with God in daily life:

For in this sense both David and Paul knew well that life is not ceaseless devotion and the world is no monastery cell (...) We begin to live a little more with and in our own heart. And when we enter our heart sufficiently deeply, we find God there, the Holy Ghost, who has compassion on us. This of itself brings us to a life of two phases; one outward and the other inward. But though at first these two are strangers to one another, they gradually approach each other, mingle together and permeate each other, until the point is reached when the inner life lends its glow to all the outward existence, and when, not the clearly conscious, but the fellowship which is apprehended with the tentacles of the soul, progresses more and more unceasingly. This is at first pure, sacred mysticism, and nothing more. But it does not keep itself at this. Unconsciously, the eye of the soul begins slowly to discover the clear reality that God dwells not only in the heart, but that in the outward life on every side he is the omnipresent, the all-directing, Almighty and the all-provident Worker. And so, we begin to have an eye for God, who in all things, and by and through all things, presses upon us. The note which arises from the depths of the heart is echoed by all of the life in which we fulfil our calling. That which formerly drew us away from God in that life and threw us back upon

the way, but not the goal. It begins with Jesus, but in the end the Father himself makes His tabernacle with us (...) Then also the abundant activity of the Holy Ghost will unfold itself.' We also see this emphasis in 2.86.463: 'The temptation to which, alas, so many yield, of staying on Golgotha, and of there closing off their account with Christ, kills the faith (...) To express this as sharply as the case allows: One closes the bargain. And now he deems himself saved (...) But in his conversation nothing is heard of a closer, tenderer relation of the soul to Christ (...) This, however, is nothing but self-conceit. Nothing but spiritual egotism is at play in this.'

ourselves, now begins with wondrous allurements to draw us more and more closely to God.⁷⁴

The point that Kuyper makes in this meditation is that the mystical life is also lived out in our daily calling. Because Kuyper seeks a balance between the 'accomplished' and the 'yet to come' of God's kingdom, he rejects dualism, extreme mysticism and orthodox unspiritual zeal. On the one hand, this emphasis is directed against organisational decisionism without a mystic soul, and on the other hand, against a mystical denial of the earthly vocation.⁷⁵ It is also related to his view that the ultimate purpose of creation is spiritual communion with God.⁷⁶

In his first meditation he remarks that we cannot withdraw ourselves from the world.⁷⁷ Although he acknowledges the 'deceptive' ideals of the world,⁷⁸ the emptiness, the restlessness and the impersonal character of the world's life,⁷⁹ the rule that 'the more you get apart from the cares and the joys of the world, the closer becomes your walk with God',⁸⁰ eternal life for our soul is not 'life hereafter, but an unfolding here of the inner self'.⁸¹ Thus, according to Kuyper, the mystical life is not distinct from the earthly life, but within it: 'And not intimacy with God in solitude, but intimacy with God in the midst of our busy lives becomes the booty of the soul.'⁸² In this way Kuyper broadens the mystical exercises to the busy public life, so that we do not make a division between God and this world, our soul and our body.⁸³ The other side is that the heavenly world of angels and the redeemed around God's throne are present with

74 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.70.376–378.

75 Compare A. de Bruijne, 'Midden in de wereld verliefd op God', 443–444; C. van der Kooi, *Het calvinisme van Kuyper en Bavinck*, 24.

76 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.90.491–492.

77 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.1.4.

78 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.20.105.

79 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.24.122.

80 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.54.292.

81 *To Be Near Unto God* 1.24.123. Compare 2.57.310: 'Close fellowship with God must become actual in the full and vigorous revelation of our life. It must permeate and give richness to our feeling, perceptions, sensations, thoughts, imagination, purposes, acts and words.' See also 2.70.

82 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.66.357. See also 1.54.265, 2.97.526–527 and 2.79.425: 'Heroic devotion to one's task in life goes hand in hand with an ever-richer development of the life of prayer. The sphere of the life of prayer and the sphere of one's calling in life begin more and more to overlap one another.' Compare A. de Bruijne, 'Midden in de wereld verliefd op God', 448.

83 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.98.532–538.

us.⁸⁴ Another flip-side is that earthly things become the greatest temptation, because earthly things can be separated from God.⁸⁵

How does this approach relate to Calvin? Kuyper and Calvin acknowledge our calling in this world, and both men are critical of this present world, but in Kuyper's approach, Christians can explore their spiritual life within the calling in this life, because mystical union is a 'motor' for our responsibility in public life. Ultimately, for Kuyper, the glory of God in public life seems the goal of our spirituality.

In Kuyper's rejection of dualism, the duality between the 'accomplished' and 'yet to come' of God's kingdom appears to merge into a continuum. The reality of our union with Christ in his ascension connects heaven and earth.⁸⁶ Thereby, the indwelling of the Spirit confirms on the one hand that heaven and earth are related, while on the other hand, this concept explains the piety of being active in the public life.⁸⁷

According to Calvin, believers fulfil their calling in a spiritual way, but the goal of their spiritual life extends beyond this present life. In Calvin's approach, there is a clear duality between this present world and eschatological redemption. Therefore, for Calvin, the Christian life is more strongly determined by the Christian hope and as a consequence, the Christian's pilgrim status in this world.⁸⁸ The contrast between 'accomplished' and 'yet to come' in Calvin's theology is also related to his stronger emphasis on the faith that lives from the invisible reality in Christ.

4 Conclusions and Considerations

In general, we can conclude that, in the broader context, Calvin and Kuyper can both be defined as reformed theologians. Their theological concurrence concerns not only public life, but also their spirituality. Both theologians understand mystical union to be the source of the Christian life. Both theologians cannot be characterized as formalists and both theologians underline the experiential character of the Christian faith. There are, however, notable differences between their spiritualities.

84 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.94.510–514.

85 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.97.527–532.

86 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.102.562–563.

87 *To Be Near Unto God* 2.70.376–379.

88 Compare O. Noordmans about the movement from faith to culture in Kuyper, and the movement back to the Word in his own plea, 'Kritieke spanningen in de gereformeerde theologie', *Verzamelde werken* (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 4:107–130.

According to Kuyper, union with Christ is the starting point for developing an affective and active higher mystical life in the present, although he was not a stranger to disappointments in his personal, ecclesiastical and political life. In Calvin's spirituality, the brokenness of the present age is more developed, and daily justification by faith in Christ plays a more central role, the mortification of the old nature is an arduous conflict, and the expectation of the spiritual life of the age to come is more emphasized. While Calvin lives from the paradox of faith, Kuyper's central doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit reasons from an organic progressive development of the regenerated Christian life.

While for Calvin the spiritual union with Christ means that we do not belong to this world anymore, for Kuyper it means that we see this world as a realm for exploring mystical unity with Christ. Here also, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is an important starting point for his interpretation. While Calvin lives from redemption *extra nos*, Kuyper is focused on redemption *in nobis*. In Kuyper's spirituality we see more *theologia gloriae* (theology of glory), while in Calvin's spirituality, we observe more of the *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross). For Kuyper the continuity of God's future kingdom is more important than the discontinuity, while for Calvin it is the lens he uses to interpret God's kingdom.