CONCLUSION: KUYPER’S SIGNIFICANCE FOR ECOTHEOLOGY AND THE NEED FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON CREATION AND SALVATION

The preceding observations illustrate just how difficult it is to do justice to both creation and salvation. The one is all too easily undermined by or subsumed under the other. Alternatively, the acts of God may become compartmentalised. In both cases this would easily lead to a skewed social ethics. The distortions that emerge become evident especially when one reflects on the place of the earth, of the created ordering (creatura), in God’s economy. Put colloquially, if Christians and Christian theologians mess up the narrative of God’s work (which happens all too easily), we will tend to mess up the earth as part of God’s creation too—since we will then fail to gather the “moral” of the story.

Kuyper may not have worked out this pattern of telling the story of God’s work—of creation, fallen creation and re-creation—in full detail. As indicated above, there are several aspects of his version of the story that may indeed be criticised. Nevertheless, in my view, he should be honoured as the first major theologian in the (Dutch) reformed tradition to introduce this pattern so insistently. This, indeed, is his legacy. Here lies his significance for current discussions on creation and salvation in the context of ecotheology—not merely in the over-worked notion of common grace, in his example of doing public theology, in his pluralist notion of sphere sovereignty or in his views on responsible stewardship—which are more often employed for conservative positions on social and environmental issues than not.

One may also raise questions about Kuyper’s understanding of the nature of salvation and the cosmic scope of God’s work. At times, he couples his broad notion of common grace with a rather narrow and almost individualist notion of salvation as regeneration. This suggests that further reflection is required on the nature of salvation and, on that basis, on the relationship between creation and salvation as acts of God. As I will argue below, Van Ruler’s work in this regard, partly on the basis of the track pathed by Kuyper and Bavinck, is particularly promising.
Van Ruler on Creation and Salvation

Following correspondence with Dirk van Keulen on his contribution to this volume, I received from him an essay by Van Ruler on creation and redemption that has since then been included in the third volume of his Verzameld werk.\(^1\) Although this essay is based on rather sketchy handwritten notes by Arnold van Ruler for a lecture before the Studium Generale on 9 November 1958 (documented as I, 481C), it is in my view one of the best maps of the terrain that I have come across.

It may be helpful to offer a synopsis of Van Ruler’s argument (partly since it is not available in English). I will then offer some comments on his notion of “re-creation.” In my view, this may help to take forward the debate on the relationship between creation and salvation in the context of contemporary ecotheology. This is not to resolve the matter, but merely to set an agenda for further reflection.

In his reflections, Van Ruler first observes that theological reflection on the relationship between creation and salvation is intertwined with a number of other questions—on the relationship between the general and the specific, on what is given (creation) and what has been added (the Redeemer), the meal at home and the Lord’s Supper, state and church, our culture and the gospel, humanity and Christianity, philosophy and theology. The question that is at stake here may also be framed as follows: Am I a human being in order to become a Christian or am I a Christian in order to become human (or are these two unrelated or mutually exclusive)? Is Christian theology primarily interested in soteriology or also in ontology? If it is impossible for humans not to be interested in ontology, is there not a danger that one could give soteriological answers to ontological questions—which may well lead to a Gnostic perversion of the gospel?

Van Ruler then proceeds to offer a typology of five possible answers to these questions:

(a) The God who created is other, lower than the God who redeemed. The true God of love is known only from the gospel. The God who forgives me is other than the one whose storms rage over us.

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