

Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures On Calvinism* (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). Pp. 182. Reviewed by Morris McDonald.

These six lectures by Dr. Kuyper were delivered at Princeton University in 1898 as part of the Stone Lecture Series. He noted in his final lecture, “The chief purpose of my lecturing in this country was to eradicate the wrong idea that Calvinism represented an exclusively dogmatic and ecclesiastical movement” (155), which theme opens Kuyper’s third lecture, “Calvin and Politics.” Kuyper emphasized this one point, that is, Calvinism alone provides a system for a complete or total worldview.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) delivered the 1898 lectures as a renowned reformed theologian, a warm-hearted preacher of the gospel, bold defender of the Christian faith. Later he was to become the prime minister of his native Holland.

Drawing a comparison of the two great Reformation leaders, Kuyper observed, “Luther’s starting point was . . . justifying faith; while Calvin’s, extending far wider, lay in the general cosmological principle of the sovereignty of God” (13). Kuyper saw in Luther an exalted system of doctrine and church but in Calvin a broader application of God as sovereign in all spheres of life. Hence, the legacy of Luther was a German church, a Scandinavian church, etc., while in Calvinism there arose the freedom loving Dutch, Hungarians, the Scots, the Swiss, the Puritans, the Huguenots, and the Americans. Kuyper quoted Edmond Burke, John Hancock, and Alexander Hamilton on the uniqueness of the American Revolution. Note: “In the sphere of Calvinism, as also in your [American] Declaration the knee is bowed to God” (75). As evidence of Calvinism’s contribution to liberty for both church and state, Kuyper spoke of “the Calvinists, in the age of the Reformation, [who] yielded their victims by tens of thousands to the scaffold and the stake” (86).

One may speak of a Lutheran church (or Catholic church), but seldom of Lutheranism as a system of liberty and nation building, while one speaks freely of Calvinism as a cornerstone for liberty and nation building, but not of a church body using as its name—a Calvin or a Calvinistic church.

The Dutch theologian asserted that through Calvinism “the human heart . . . discovered its high and holy calling to consecrate every department of life and every energy at its disposal to the glory of God,” and further, “a given form for political and social life, for the interpretation of the moral world order, for the relation between nature and grace, between Christianity and the world, between church and state, and finally for art and science” (xi-xii).

The six lectures are (1) Calvinism as a Life System, (2) Calvinism and Religion, (3) Calvinism and Politics, (4) Calvinism and Science, (5) Calvinism and Art, and (6) Calvinism and the Future.

The final lecture is a bright jewel in its summation of the lecture series that has a Machen-like sincerity and simplicity in relating great biblical truths. Like Machen three decades later, Kuyper sounded this alarm about missions, “Pray, how can we continue to prosecute missions, unless we have a well-defined gospel to preach?” (171).

This is a refreshing exercise to read. Get a copy and read it as part of your study of Calvin and Calvinism in 2009.