

Record #1803

Jim Bratt Sabbatical Application 2009-2010

Last Name	Bratt	First Name	Jim	Department	History
Email address	jbratt@calvin.edu				
Project Title	Abraham Kuyper: A Life in Religion, Politics, & Culture				
Project Abstract	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>I am requesting sabbatical support to complete the biography I am writing of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). My aim in this project is to provide English-language audiences with a memorable portrait of Kuyper's important ideas and the measures he undertook to implement them, setting these in the contexts of their origins and application. My account emphasizes how much Kuyper took part in the larger intellectual, political, and social universe of his times and how, accordingly, he is broadly relevant in our own. Understanding the circumstances in which his grand principles emerged can help us relativize his claims where needed, more astutely appropriate those parts that are still helpful, and fathom the remarkable creativity that went into his efforts and that we would do well to emulate. Not pretending to be a complete life-and-times, this biography does aim to cover the full spectrum of Kuyper's interests and the process by which they developed. Since Kuyper's work constituted a bold effort to demonstrate the vital contribution that traditional religion can make to modern political, cultural, and intellectual life, it speaks anew, a century later, to the resurgence of that sort of faith around the world. My book will be critically a point of view to provide the academy with a cogent study of interest from a responsible Christian point of view, offering people of faith a readable and instructive work of serious academic research.</p>				
Outside Funding	<p>I am applying for a Sabbatical Position at Calvin College. I am currently a Resident Fellow at the Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology at Calvin College. I am currently a Resident Fellow at the Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology at Calvin College. I am currently a Resident Fellow at the Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology at Calvin College. Status: pending. Notification date: 31 January 2009.</p>				
Project Details	<p>Bratt pd.pdf see page 4</p>				
Project Outcome	<p>I am contracted with Eerdmans Publishing Company to publish this book in its Library of Religious Biography, a series that includes such titles as Harry Stout's Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism; David Bebbington's William Ewart Gladstone; Edwin Gaustad's Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson; and Allen Guelzo's prize-winning Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President. The series is designed to bring serious scholarship to an informed lay audience, and Eerdmans has a strong market in theology and culture, in religious history, and on civil-society questions and the relationship between religion and politics around the globe.</p> <p>I anticipate giving a good number of talks, both formal and informal, on Kuyper once the book is out since his work and legacy are of interest to people in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, to leaders in North American Christian higher education, and to scholars and activists concerned with religion and politics, at home and abroad. I'm sure I will be asked to speak in the Netherlands on how and why Kuyper looks interesting from a North American point of view. I envision someday publishing a separate collection of comparative essays exploring political theory and practice in the Reformed tradition in different times and places, and certainly Kuyper would feature large in it. In bringing the biography to a conclusion, then, this sabbatical will fulfill a project of longstanding</p>				

personal interest but also lead on to a further step that integrates the Dutch Reformed and Americanist sides of my scholarly career.

For Calvin College the product of this sabbatical will help people cultivate a fuller and more systematic awareness of one of the most significant figures in the college's heritage. To the extent that we live out of—or at least invoke—the “Kuyperian tradition,” we ought to know as much as we can about it so that, whether we would deepen, reject, or revise him, we can always more knowledgeably approach Kuyper's thought and example and gain better understanding of our educational purpose.

For the historical profession the project has value on three counts. The most basic is to expand our knowledge of an important subject. Secondly, this book will give historians another example of comparative work that cuts across the national boundaries which have so dominated the guild's division of labor. The “globalization of national history” is a hot topic in the field right now and counts some fine first fruits; having an Americanist bring out a Dutch biography will further this movement. Thirdly, this study ought to burnish the reputation of Christian scholarship in the secular academy by contributing an analysis of one of the founders of the Christian scholarship project by a practitioner thereof that nonetheless meets high scholarly standards. It will be a fitting testimony in many ways for Kuyper to be the subject of a critically appreciative Christian interpretation of his life, and for that life in the process to become more understandable to people who both do and do not share his faith commitments.

Pedagogical Impact I have not been able to tap student assistants on this project because of the Dutch language barrier, but my teaching has been enriched materially and methodologically by the research and writing I have completed on it to date, and I expect that will be all the more true once the sabbatical is over and the book is finished. The European base of the project has both forced and helped to set my US history courses in international context. Since this is a rising trend in the field, I find myself ahead of the curve in pedagogical emphasis. As Kuyper's career (1870-1920) coincided with the first era of globalization under industrialism, my research has also added content and color to the History core course I offer at Calvin, *The West in the World, 1450-2000*. Parallel and divergent developments in 19th-century Europe have deepened my understanding of American intellectual and religious developments which I cover in upper-level courses in our major. Since Kuyper is so important to the history and current character of Calvin College, understanding him in the international context of his times has helped me, in the classroom and college-wide deliberations, better fathom how the religious convictions and ancillary impact of Calvinism might apply afresh in our own time and place.

Itinerary/Work Schedule By September 2009 I will have completed two-thirds of the project (the Introduction plus Chapters 1-7 and 11-14 on the Table of Contents above). My pace of completion has been six weeks of full-time, uninterrupted work per chapter, including penultimate editing and notation/bibliographical work. Writing the remaining five chapters and Epilogue should therefore take eight to nine months, leaving summer 2010 for final editing and reference checking. The manuscript would be submitted to the publisher by September 2010. The project requires no further visits to archives or other research trips.

Budget Supplement of 50 percent of Calvin salary has been requested from the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. If that application is unsuccessful I will draw off my TIAA-CREF funds and plan on extending my teaching career by a year to compensate.

Research Funding History Over the past ten years I have been pursuing projects in two different domains simultaneously: in American religious history, the area of my

primary scholarly training and North American networks; and on the life and work of Abraham Kuyper, a subject of international interest and research network that is rooted in my personal background and institutional affiliation. While drawing off my professional training, the Kuyper project lies somewhat distant from my principal teaching assignment and demands unusual language skills for a career Americanist. Thus, while it might seem to have been more efficient to pursue the two sequentially, it has been important for me to work along both paths simultaneously so that I could maintain credibility in the area of my primary professional identity while keeping two different scholarly networks intact. I think, therefore, that my funding and production under both projects should be taken into account for consideration of this sabbatical application.

KUYPER FUNDING

- Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (1995-1996). Reduced teaching load to edit "Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Anthology." Resulted in publication of Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Anthology (Eerdmans, 1998).
- Calvin Research Fellowship (July-December 1998). Summer stipend and reduced teaching load to begin work on a biography of Abraham Kuyper.
- Calvin Alumni Association Faculty Research Grant (Summer 1999). Travel and related expenses for research in the Abraham Kuyper papers at the Historische Documentatie Centrum, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Calvin College sabbatical grant (Fall term 2002) to continue research and writing on the life of Abraham Kuyper. This funding has resulted in the publication of one book and six scholarly articles/chapters and six presentations at academic conferences, besides less formal talks delivered at area churches. I have applied, unsuccessfully, for year-long fellowships in support of this project from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study and the Erasmus Institute at the University of Notre Dame.

US RELIGIOUS HISTORY FUNDING

- McGregor Fellowship (June-August 2000). Stipend for student assistant to collaborate in the creation of a critical anthology of anti-revivalistic documents from antebellum sources. Resulted in publication of "Religious Anti-revivalism in Antebellum America," Journal of the Early Republic 24/1 (Spring 2004) 65-106, which was awarded the Ralph D. Gray Article Prize from the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, 21 July 2005; and Antirevivalism in Antebellum America: A Collection of Religious Voices (Rutgers University Press, 2006).
- McGregor Fellowship (June-August 2007). Stipend for student assistant to conduct literature search, précis, and evaluations of recent publications regarding antebellum American religious movements. This laid the groundwork for the next project I will pursue after the 2009-10 sabbatical.
- I have accepted a commission from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to create and edit a collection of scholarly articles illustrating the significance of the historical study of worship practices for the fields of American religious studies, practical theology, and liturgical studies. This volume, tentatively entitled Worship, Work, and Worldview: A Volume of Case Studies from American Religious History (Eerdmans, 2009), will go to press at the end of 2008. It will include my Introduction and a chapter on "The Liturgical Role in Political Power: Two Protestant Congregations in a 20th-Century City."

Owner: Crook, Dawn

Created: NOV-04-2008 8:55 AM (EST)

Last Modified: MAR-24-2009 7:26 AM (EDT) by Crook, Dawn

SABBATICAL PROPOSAL
“Abraham Kuyper: A Life in Politics, Religion, & Culture”
James D. Bratt
Dept of History, Calvin College

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I am requesting sabbatical support at 50 percent of salary for academic year 2009-10 to finish the biography I am writing of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). My aim in this project is to provide English-language audiences with a memorable portrait of Kuyper’s important ideas and the measures he undertook to implement them, setting these in the contexts of their origins and application. My account emphasizes how much Kuyper took part in the larger intellectual, political, and social universe of his times and how, accordingly, he is broadly relevant in our own. Understanding the circumstances in which his grand principles emerged can help us relativize his claims where needed, more astutely appropriate those parts that are still helpful, and fathom the remarkable creativity that went into his efforts and that we would do well to emulate. Not pretending to be a complete life-and-times, this biography does aim to cover the full spectrum of Kuyper’s interests and the process by which they developed. My book will be critically appreciative in its point of view to provide the academy with a cogent study on a matter of more than academic interest from a responsible Christian point of view, at the same time offering people of faith a readable and instructive work deeply informed by serious research.

Topic and Significance

Abraham Kuyper was an important leader in the Dutch national life of his era and occupies a notable place in the history of the Reformed tradition. His enduring significance stems from his determination to have these two roles deeply inform each other without letting the one violate the integrity of the other. To that end Kuyper fashioned a model of public activism for people of firm religious conviction that enabled them to take part in modern, pluralistic society without privatizing their faith but also without demanding special privileges or imposing their confessional demands on others. This model, in turn, rested on Kuyper’s robust theology of creation and church unfolding *under* the canopy of divine sovereignty and *by* the operations of common grace and the animation of the Holy Spirit. The goal of his work was to see Calvinism revitalized and comprehensive once again, fit to the challenges of socio-economic modernization on the one hand and of theological Modernism on the other. Kuyper wished to reassert Calvinism’s confessional rigor against compromisers and sentimentalists, to restore its cultural mandate among world-abhorring pietists, and to show its salience as a worldview in contention with the other philosophical and ideological systems of the day.

Kuyper’s work constituted a bold effort to demonstrate the vital contribution that traditional religion can make to modern political, cultural, and intellectual life. It therefore speaks, a century later, to the resurgence of that sort of faith around the world, whether neo-evangelical in the United States, Pentecostal Christian in Latin America and Africa, or Muslim in Africa and Asia. His recognition of the value of cultural diversity and the power of pre-rational beliefs represents a major Christian entry in ongoing discussions within the North American academy.¹ His proposal for apportioning public space amid competing convictions might speak to sites of religious conflict everywhere from Indonesia to Nigeria and from the Balkans to the Middle East. His model is useful as a resource for Christians across the global south and east who are emerging as leaders in society and academy in their particular venues. In short,

Kuyper's insights are relevant a hundred years after he voiced them, and his example needs to be effectively conveyed to the world outside his native Netherlands.

I say "convey his example" advisedly, for there is much in Kuyper *not* to be followed. On race, gender relations, cultural hierarchy, and Christian triumphalism, he erred, sometimes egregiously. These errors, moreover, could be deeply interwoven with his best impulses and insights. Kuyper thus offers a cautionary tale for people of conviction who wish to influence public life—especially for people of Reformed Christian conviction, whether they are newly entered into that stream or have inherited it from of old. Still, Kuyper apprehended the modern condition so astutely, anticipated some postmodern responses so remarkably, and plumbed the resources of Reformed Christianity so deeply that we cannot simply dismiss his efforts or example. All our giants are flawed and mortal, but we ignore them at our peril—the peril of missing their insights, repeating their mistakes, and faltering amid confusion and compromise.

Approach and place of the project

A biography offers particular advantages for conveying this complex and nuanced analysis. Kuyper has been the subject of any number of thematic studies: on his theology, his politics, his political theology; on his attitudes toward the academy and the arts, philosophy and foreign affairs, the United States and South Africa, not to mention on class, race, and gender. Each of these studies verges upon (and some fall over into) distortion by abstracting one element from a truly interactive whole. Kuyper's life and thought were all of a piece, paradoxical and tension-ridden though that piece might have been. It is important, therefore, to supply the context of the life out of which the thought proceeded, the dynamics of the thought as they propelled his career, the national setting in which that career unfolded, the international situations to which he was responding. The biography will not circle back to adjudicate previous thematic studies but will provide the background for others who might wish to do that while also supplying foundations for further work on old or new questions.

The volume will fill a significant need in existing scholarly literature. After a hiatus of nearly seventy years, a substantial new biography of Kuyper appeared in 2006 from Dutch historian Jeroen Koch.² Expansive and helpful as it is for specialists, its massive length (670 pp.), Dutch language, and close attention to Dutch historical and historiographical concerns will likely limit the book's appeal to broader audiences. The titles that are available in English, on the other hand, are hagiographic and innocent of recent scholarship.³ My work will be at once critical, sympathetic, and accessible, well informed by the last decades of Dutch scholarship but going beyond the Netherlands' particular concerns to show Kuyper's involvement in broader international currents—and thus also increasing his interest among an international readership. For instance, Kuyper's pluralist epistemology and social theory justified the formation of separate Christian institutions in the Netherlands but manifested many of the same impulses that animated proto-Modernist intellectuals across the North Atlantic world who were his contemporaries. Likewise, his political efforts were closely calibrated to Dutch conditions but represented the most significant Protestant entry in Europe's Christian Democratic movement and a co-belligerency in the international progressivism of his time. Finally, more than Koch's work, my biography will integrate Kuyper's personal and family dynamics with his public concerns, will attend to his seminal works of cultural and theological commentary rather than to correspondence with political collaborators, and will show a critical Calvinist empathy with a subject that Koch viewed—and in some cases misapprehended—as a religious outsider.

At the same time, my book's due attention to Kuyper's Dutch context will help leaven the agendas traditionally pursued at the principal sites of Kuyper studies outside the Netherlands. South Africans have focused on the extent to which his theory of sphere sovereignty gave warrant to the apartheid system, but that application was made by leaders who might have invoked Kuyper's name without comprehending his broader work.⁴ North Americans have seized upon his presuppositional epistemology and confessional-yet-activist ecclesiology to define a third option for Protestants between the deficiencies of fundamentalist evangelicalism and liberalism.⁵ Yet the Kuyper who put forward these theoretical perspectives was also a practical politician and institution-builder whose impact depended on his success in bridging the theory-practice gap that bedevils so much of North American ecclesiastical life.

Finally, my project will try to rise above the alternating cycle of adulation and recrimination that tends to mark Kuyper studies. Kuyper could speak with immense prescriptive authority, as did many of those who promoted his cause on all three continents. This incited resentment and over-reaction among subsequent generations. Still others who have come to Kuyper out of the secularist or fundamentalist wilderness have tended to accord him undue reverence. My book will try to right the balance by taking him as an historical example that is too important to ignore, yet too distant and partial simply to copy.

On this angle of approach, I hope to write a life of Kuyper as a public intellectual who restated the claims of a traditional religion in a rapidly modernizing context. It will be my particular interest to:

1. explore Kuyper's religious development. Which parts of his heritage did he jettison? How much did he change or reformulate in what he kept, and from what sources?
2. trace the sources of his socio-political thinking and measure the fit between that and his religious agenda. Was the correlation theological, cultural, pragmatic, or some (and if so, which?) combination of the three?
3. chart the strategies by which he hoped to implement his ideals. How did these vary from one situation to another, and what successes and limitations did they meet?
4. trace the substance and trajectory of his cultural criticism. Which contemporaneous thinkers did he (and did he not) deal with, and how did his particular articulation of Reformed Christianity both differ and borrow from these?
5. point out from time to time some similarities and contrasts to notable religio-political projects that have emerged since Kuyper's era. How does his work compare, for instance, with the civil rights and Christian Right movements in the second half of 20th-century America? With pro- and anti-apartheid movements in South Africa? By way of conclusion the book will review how Kuyper's legacy has been used, and abused, in the Netherlands, South Africa, and North America.

Research method and materials

My research is focused largely on published primary and secondary materials. This is no mean limit, since Kuyper's own publications comprise a list of 223 items. Since the book does not aspire to be complete life-and-times, I am not conducting a thorough investigation of manuscript sources, national and municipal archives, institutional records, etc., but am depending on secondary studies that have.⁶ On points where such studies are lacking, I have gone through Kuyper's personal correspondence, unpublished sermons, and portfolio collections at the Historische Documentatie Centrum at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Similarly, Kuyper's journalism is too vast to review in toto for the purposes of this study; I am relying on the extracts

therefrom which were published as pamphlets or bound volumes. I am using Kuyper's formal and applied theological scholarship (e.g., his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, *De Gemeene Gratie*, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*) and political platform (*Ons Program*) and the large secondary literature that these have generated.⁷ I have found the most helpful sources to be occasional pieces such as his rectorial addresses at the VU (*Evolutie*, *De Verflauwing der Grenzen*) or at synodical or political-party gatherings (e.g., *Maranatha*). I am very familiar with this genre from having edited an English-language anthology of Kuyper's shorter works⁸ and am using some of them as hinge pieces in the biography. Likewise, the ten articles I have published on Kuyper to date (see attached c.v.) form the core of several chapters in the book.

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EPILOGUE

Chapter 17 Legacies

Dissemination

I am contracted with William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company to publish this book in its Library of Religious Biography, a series that includes such titles as Harry Stout's *Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*; David Bebbington's *William Ewart Gladstone*; Edwin Gaustad's *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson*; and Allen Guelzo's prize-winning *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*.

The series is designed to bring serious scholarship to an informed lay audience, and Eerdmans has a strong market in theology and culture, in religious history, and on civil-society questions and the relationship between religion and politics around the globe.

NOTES

¹As analyzed by Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), and James C. Turner, "Something to be Reckoned With," *Commonweal* 126/1 (15 January 1999): 11-14.

²Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006). The last previous complete biography was P. Kasteel, *Abraham Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1937).

³Frank Vandenberg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, 1960); Louis Praamsma, *Let Christ be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper* (Jordan Station, ON, 1985); James McGoldrick, *God's Renaissance Man: Abraham Kuyper* (Darlington, UK, 2000). Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 1998) is a fine overview of Kuyper's mature thought but does not attempt a full biography.

⁴John De Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology* (Cape Town, 1991); Alan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (New York, 1984); H. Russel Botman, "The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa," in Luis Lugo, ed., *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, 2000).

⁵Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, 1976), and *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, 1983); James W. Skillen and Rockne McCarthy, eds., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society* (Atlanta, 1991); John C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture* (Marlton, NJ, 1978).

⁶Especially Jasper Vree, *Kuyper in de Kiem: De precalvinistische periode van Abraham Kuyper, 1848-1874* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006); Rienk Janssens, *De opbouw van de Antirevolutionaire partij, 1850-1888* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001); George Harinck, Roel Kuiper, and Peter Bok, eds., *De Antirevolutionaire partij, 1829-1980* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001); J. Stellingwerff, *Dr. Abraham Kuyper en de Vrije Universiteit* (Kampen: Kok, 1987); George Puchinger, *Abraham Kuyper: de jonge Kuyper (1837-1867)* (Franeker, 1987); and various of the essays collected in Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn, eds., *Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of his Life and Work* (Amsterdam, 1999); C. Augustijn and J. Vree, eds., *Abraham Kuyper: vast en veranderlijk* (Zoetermeer, 1998); and C. Augustijn, et al., eds., *Abraham Kuyper: zijn volksdeel, zijn invloed* (Delft, 1987).

⁷For instance, Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); G. Kuijpers, *Abraham Kuyper over de mens* (Dordrecht: G. Kuijpers, 1998); W. H. Velema, *De leer van de Heilige Geest bij Abraham Kuyper* („s Gravenshage, 1957); Louis Praamsma, *Kuyper als Kerkhistoricus* (Kampen: Kok, 1945); Simon Jan Ridderbos, *De Theologische Cultuurbeschouwing van Abraham Kuyper* (Kampen: Kok, 1947).

⁸James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).