

FACT SHEET ON ABRAHAM KUYPER

- AK was born in the Dutch town of Maassluis near Rotterdam on October 29, 1837.
- He was converted to Christ when he was ten years of age.
- He was a gifted pupil in school, an avid reader of newspapers, and developed an interest in journalism and politics early on.
- He enrolled as a student of theology at Leiden University in the summer of 1855, and within seven years received his degree (1863), having written his dissertation comparing the doctrine of the church in the theology of John Calvin and a Polish reformer named John á Lasco.

While a theology student at Leiden, Kuyper severed his connection with reformed orthodoxy, and embraced the theological liberalism of the Leiden school.

His reading of the novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*, published in 1853 by Charlotte M. Yonge (1823-1902), showed him that he remained a weak and sinful person in need of God's grace. This book, second only to the Bible in significance to Kuyper, contributed significantly to his return to his classical Christian roots.

- AK married Johanna Hendrika Schaay in 1863.
- He took his first parish in 1863 in the little town of Beesd, where he encountered ordinary village people who imparted to AK a living expression of the faith, and the coherency of a Christian worldview. Under their influence, he underwent a second conversion, emerging as an orthodox Calvinist which he would remain for the rest of his life.
- AK's "second conversion" in Beesd resulted in a commitment to the orthodox party in the church and to the anti-revolutionary party in politics.

Note: the anti-revolutionary party in politics was one that opposed the secular principles that had inspired the French Revolution and were in accord with Reformed doctrine expressed in the Three Formulae for Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and the Synod of Dordt).

- From 1867 until 1870, AK served the *Domkerk* in Utrecht, becoming embroiled in theological controversies with the liberal "Ethical" wing of the Dutch Reformed Church, and engaging in debate on the issue of Christian and/or state education.
- In 1872, AK founded and became the chief editor of the newspaper *De Standaard*, incorporating within itself the religious weekly *De Heraut*, which Kuyper edited since 1871; the newspaper became the chief journalistic organ of the revolutionary party. Over a fifty year period, AK wrote 1000s of articles on political, cultural, and educational issues. Through these articles, AK dominated the political and religious debated in the Netherlands for almost half a century.
- On March 20, 1874, AK at age 36, having won a recent parliamentary election, took the required oaths and assumed a seat in the Second Chamber in the Hague as a member of the Dutch Parliament. He saw his post as a means of serving the anti-revolutionary party, and of promoting the reformation of society according to Christian principles.
- AK suffered a nervous breakdown in February 1876, the cause likely due to overwork, personal attacks from political opponents, and the disappointment associated with his support of the American evangelist Pearsall Smith, who fell from grace in an adulterous affair.

- The Anti-Revolutionary Party was founded on April 3, 1879, largely due to AK's efforts; it was the first modern, organized popular political party in the Netherlands.
- AK was the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, its first Rector Magnificus, and also a professor of theology. The doors opened on October 20, 1880, reshaping higher education in the Netherlands, which came to be organized along religious and ideological lines.
- From 1880-1898, AK was characteristically busy, working on a number of projects. He lectured and wrote extensively on education, produced numerous meditative and devotional works, exerted strenuous efforts toward ecclesiastical reform, began an initiative to work with Roman Catholics in the political and social domains. He also served as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901-1905. He died on November 8, 1920 at the age of 82.
- In 1898, he traveled to the USA to deliver the prestigious Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary, beginning on October 10, 1898. He chose as his subject, "Calvinism," which he believed to be "the only decisive, lawful and consistent defence for Protestant nations against the encroaching, and overwhelming Modernism." He sought to present Calvinism as an all-embracing "life-system" or worldview (*Weltanschauung*), stressing the relationship between God, humankind, and the world. He wished to dispel the notion that Calvinism was merely a doctrinal system or ecclesiastical structure. Instead, he sought to show how it was a comprehensive Christian philosophy rooted, as was Calvin's theology, in the notions of creation, fall, and redemption, comprehensively conceived. Hence, his Stone Lectures covered the following topics:
 - Calvinism as a Life-System • Calvinism and History • Calvinism and Religion • Calvinism and Politics • Calvinism and Science • Calvinism and Art • Calvinism and the Future
- AK has been described in these terms: "A man with a powerful and dominant personality, a broad and encyclopedic knowledge, a lively and engaging style, a pedagogic and polemical talent, an inexhaustible reserve of vitality and energy, an aptitude for inspiring, mobilizing, and organizing large numbers of people with constructive capacity and tactical ingenuity."
- He declared his life's mission in the following poetic lines:

For me, one desire rules my life
 One urge drives soul and will. . . .
 It is to re-establish God's holy ordinances
 In Church and home, in state and school,
 Regardless of the world's protestations,
 For the benefit of the nation.
 It is to engrave those divine ordinances,
 To which Word and Creation witnesses,
 So clearly on the nation
 That once again it bows its knee to God.
- AK's comprehensive vision of the Calvinist, Christian faith, engendering what has come known as "neo-Calvinism" or "Kuyperianism," has been particularly influential in Reformed theological circles in the United States, and has been promulgated by those associated with Calvin College in the USA and the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His thought has been particularly influential among the institutions associated with the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, contributing significantly to the recent renaissance in evangelical Christian scholarship. His influence has also reached mainstream Protestant, evangelical Christianity as the following quotation from Charles Colson indicates:

"It's absolutely vital that we look at Christianity as a major life system. Only if we project it this way into the new millennium can we really impact our culture and the world."

Bibliography:

- Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931. (Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University Under Auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation).
- Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Company, 1998.