Approaching the Complex, Cultural Other:

Towards a Renewal of Christian Cultural Engagement in the Reformed Tradition

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Abstract

In the Reformed evangelical tradition, there are ongoing discussions concerning approaches to Christian cultural engagement. Broadly speaking, the tradition lacks an approach for an engagement that upholds the integrity of the tradition at the same time as taking cultural complexity seriously. In this thesis I suggest that a renewal of Christian cultural engagement is possible through an approach that brings together the Reformed theological movement known as neo-Calvinism and the field of cultural anthropology in dialogue. This approach will be formed through both an analysis of the cultural theology of Abraham Kuyper and its subsequent developments, and a survey of pertinent issues concerning the idea of “culture” and “the other” in cultural anthropology. From this dialogue, I identify three dynamic ideas for a renewed approach to Christian theological cultural engagement. First, because of cultural complexity, all cultural worlds are to be approached as simultaneously meaningful and indefinable. Second, because of this tension between meaningfulness and indefinability, theological cultural engagement requires the holding of multiple perspectives as it seeks both to contextualise and remain theologically faithful. Third, a culturally contextual and theologically faithful approach to cultural works yields a positive view of creation and a hope of cultural harvest that gives cultural activity meaning and purpose. This approach to Christian cultural engagement is both faithful to and a development of Kuyperian thought. It is distinct from other approaches in the Reformed tradition because it draws on influences from cultural anthropology. This thesis will demonstrate how such an approach to Christian cultural engagement is able to give meaning to the development of cultural worlds without stultifying them, how it is able to support the multiplex nature of human diversity while upholding human commonness, and how it is able to give hope, meaning, and equality to the works of diverse cultural communities.

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Chapter One: An Introduction to Christian Theological Cultural Engagement

1.1 Introduction: Research Questions

Can Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition uphold the integrity of the theological tradition at the same time as taking seriously the realities of cultural complexity? This is the primary research question at the heart of this thesis. To answer this question, this thesis will demonstrate that it is possible to develop an approach to Christian cultural engagement that upholds the integrity of the Reformed tradition at the same time as upholding cultural complexity experienced by the cultural "other". I will do this by bringing together the Reformed theological movement known as neo-Calvinism with the field of cultural anthropology in dialogue.[1] Alongside my primary research question stated above, there are three further questions that stimulate the renewal of Christian cultural engagement in this thesis. Firstly, what are the distinct advantages of bringing together two distinct and different disciplines in dialogue to develop a renewed approach? I will answer this question by describing how theology and anthropology serve as cultural reference points in this thesis by being each other's cultural "other" and by referring to the interdisciplinary context of integrating their concerns dialogically. Secondly, what is the problem with current theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition that necessitates a renewed approach? I will answer this question by referring briefly to the work of three Reformed theologians in this area: Daniel Strange, Ted Turnau, and Donald A. Carson. Thirdly, to what extent does a renewed approach demonstrate faithfulness to the Reformed tradition, and neo-Calvinism in particular, and to what extent does it push the boundaries? I will answer this question with an explanation of how the concepts of post-cultural engagement and "otherness" show faithfulness to, and a development of, Kuyperian ideas.

[1] Originally, the term neo-Calvinist was used negatively by his critics to describe the contemporary contextualization of Calvinism by the late nineteenth century Dutch theologian, journalist, and statesman Abraham Kuyper. Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 92.

1.1.1 A renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement

To answer the primary research question and address the problem of cultural complexity in Christian cultural engagement this thesis will form an approach through an analysis of the neo-Calvinist theology of Abraham Kuyper and its subsequent and contemporary developments, along with a review of the issues surrounding the definition of "culture" in cultural anthropology. Through an integration of the concerns of both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology I will propose three ideas to form the foundation for a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement. First, because of cultural complexity, cultural engagement must approach cultural worlds as simultaneously meaningful and undefinable. Second, because of the tension between meaningfulness and indefinability, cultural engagement must be multiperspectival as it seeks both to culturally contextualise and to remain faithful the theological tradition. Third, an approach to Christian cultural engagement that is both culturally contextual and theologically faithful must also provide a positive view of creation and cultural works that gives purpose and meaning to human cultural activity. Throughout this thesis the singular word "culture" will appear in quotation marks to demonstrate that this word is insufficient to fully describe the complexities of cultural realities experienced by human beings.[2]

1.1.2 An introduction to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement

In this chapter I will give a brief description of the Reformed theological movement neo-Calvinism and, in addressing my second research question, I will state the rationale behind bringing together cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinist theology as dialogue partners, with a focus on the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis. Secondly, in answer to my third research question, I will briefly explain the need for a renewed approach to theological engagement in the Reformed tradition. With reference to the cultural analysis of three Reformed theologians, Daniel Strange, Ted Turnau, and Donald Carson, I will

[2] Ethnographer James Clifford warns against the dangers of "extreme self-consciousness" which include "putting the whole world in quotation marks." However, he continues: "But I trust that readers who signal these dangers will do so…*after* they have confronted the changing history, rhetoric, and politics of established representational forms." James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), 25.

highlight the current inadequacies in not acknowledging the indefinable nature of "culture" and cultural complexities, a failing which undermines the cultural "other". Finally, I will conclude this Introduction with an explanation of how I intend the thesis to stand as both faithful to and a development of the neo-Calvinist movement in the Reformed tradition, in answer to my fourth research question. Through a faithful development of Kuyperian thought and drawing on influences from cultural anthropology, this thesis will address the issue of cultural complexity in Christian cultural engagement by developing an approach that gives meaning to cultural worlds, upholds cultural diversity and human commonness, and provides purpose and hope to the cultural works of the complex, cultural "other".

1.1.3 Developing a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement

In Chapter Two I will review neo-Calvinism in its historical context, tracing the movement's origins back to the Dutch statesman, theologian, minister, and journalist, Abraham Kuyper.[3] In this chapter I will also refer to Herman Bavinck and Klaas Schilder whose developments of Kuyper's theology also form the foundation for neo-Calvinism.[4] Throughout this survey I will consider the three areas of concern highlighted above in light of Kuyperian theology. This historical analysis will be followed in Chapter Three by a review of contemporary scholars who either stand directly in the Kuyperian line or whose work has been positively associated with it.[5] Again, the issues of complexity, of

[3] According to scholar James D. Bratt, Abraham Kuyper was "remarkable." He is important because of his commitment to allowing "religious believers to bring the full weight of their convictions into public life while fully respecting the rights of others in a pluralistic society under a constitutional government." James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), xiii.

[4] Bavinck was Kuyper's younger colleague. In Richard Mouw's short introduction to Abraham Kuyper he describes Bavinck as working "closely with Kuyper to develop views that are associated with "neo-Calvinism."" Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 76. Schilder, although not a direct contemporary of Kuyper, stands in the neo-Calvinist tradition, although his position on the Calvinist idea of the antithesis, for example, is closer to Kuyper's earlier thought than his later emphasis, which Schilder criticizes. See e.g., Richard J. Mouw, "Klaas Schilder as Public Theologian," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, (2003): 287, https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcpi/fulltext/ctj/95610.pdf.

[5] For example, while I refer to scholars such as Richard Mouw who position themselves in the neo-Calvinist movement, I will also refer to the minister and theologian Timothy Keller who, while he may not label himself a neo-Calvinist, has been recognised by the movement as expressing Kuyperian views in his cultural engagement. For example, Mouw associates the cultural ministry of Keller's Manhattan church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, with Kuyperian principles. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 101.

contextualisation and multiple perspectives, and of a positive view of cultural works and creation will take centre stage. A complementary survey of debates surrounding the meaning of "culture" in contemporary cultural anthropology will follow in Chapter Four.[6] Having highlighted the main, relevant concerns of both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology in terms of the three areas of concern described above, I will integrate those concerns in dialogical style in Chapter Five. I will further develop this integration of ideas in Chapter Six to provide a more systematic approach to theological cultural engagement. To conclude, I will demonstrate how this thesis is both faithful to, and a development of Kuyperian ideas in the Reformed tradition, in pursuit of a renewal of Christian cultural engagement.

1.2 Theology and Cultural Anthropology: Unlikely Dialogue Partners?

Anthropologist and author Jack Eller defines cultural anthropology as "the modern science of human behavioural diversity."[7] This diversity, with the human difference and commonness that contribute to it, give anthropology as a science a particular set of questions that distinguishes it from other sciences.[8] Anthropology as a modern science has a very different starting point to that of theology: theology is to do with the study of God and presupposes the existence of God, whereas cultural anthropology needs no such presupposition, and includes religious practice and belief within its study of human behaviour.[9] Following an evolutionary approach to human development, the origins of anthropology treated religion, including Christianity, as primitive and irrational, and therefore rejected the premise of the existence of God.[10] Religious or

[6] In terms of this being a survey of "contemporary" cultural anthropological ideas I will consider issues surrounding the meaning of "culture" from the last forty years, since the "writing culture" debate emerged in the 1980's. This debate highlighted the limitations of ethnography in being able to fully capture complex cultural realities and relationships through simply writing about them. See e.g., James Clifford and George E. Marcus, "Preface," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), vii-viii.

[7] This diversity of "human bodies and behaviours" is studied both in the past, and in the present. Jack David Eller, *Cultural Anthropology: Global Forces, Local Lives* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2009), xvi, 4, https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9780203875612.

[8] Eller uses five questions as example: these concern the range of human diversity, the scope of commonness across humans, the reason for diversity, the integration of different ways to live, and the development of human behaviour over time. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 3.

[9] Davies explains that while theology sees the existence of God as imperative to religious experience, anthropology "studies the reported experiences of people" and therefore does not need the existence of God. Davies, *Theology and Anthropology*, 1.

[10] E.B. Tylor was one of the earliest anthropologists who gave credence to an anti-Christian sentiment in his writing. Historian Timothy Larsen attributes a loss of faith to Tylor,

superstitious belief belonged to a more primitive stage of human development and the continuing existence of religious belief stood opposed to scientific progress.[11] This approach to cultural anthropology has developed into what Eller also calls “a science of human otherness” in which human diversity becomes more than merely a reason for the assimilation of “the other” into a dominant cultural ideology.[12] Such an approach leaves behind ethnocentric ideas of evolutionary cultural development, even theories of cultural relativism and cultural functionalism, and has led to a more self-reflective science.[13] However, although anthropology has developed from the early notions of studying “primitive cultures” to analysing the entirety of human life, religion is still considered a part of that human life.[14] Is it possible, or even credible, therefore, to develop a dialogue concerning theological cultural engagement between two disciplines which have radically different, or even opposing starting points?

1.2.1 The challenge of cultural anthropology

As a discipline which observes human cultural activity, cultural processes, cultural changes, and cultural development cultural anthropology provides an appropriate and challenging dialogue partner to neo-Calvinism. Theologian and anthropologist Louise Lawrence writes about the relationship between biblical studies and anthropology in the following way: “Anthropology helps us straddle the divide between seeing “others” as cultural copies of ourselves and, on the other hand, seeing them as radically “other” from us.”[15] This distinction is vital in

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who had been a Quaker, brought about by “his concerted grappling with anthropological evidence and theories: he could not find a way to think anthropologically and as a Christian at the same time.” Timothy Larsen, “E.B. Tylor, religion, and anthropology,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 46, no. 3, (2013): 473.

[11] Larsen describes how Tylor’s undermining of religious beliefs as belonging to an irrational stage of human development, and his subsequent separation of religion and morality, influenced the polarization between science and religion, particularly Christian theology. Larsen, “E.B. Tylor,” 476-477.

[12] Eller also describes anthropology as “an unlikely science” in that it is not an obvious step from being aware of the “other” to scientifically studying them. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 52.

[13] This gradual shift in cultural anthropology from Tylor, through the varied developments of anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard, Boas, Malinowski, Levì-Strauss, and Clifford and Marcus has resulted in a variety of contemporary anthropological schools of thought. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 63, 66, 67-70.

[14] Eller refers to religion as “the final domain of culture.” Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*,

[15] Louise J. Lawrence, “Introduction: A Taste for “the Other”: Interpreting Biblical Texts Anthropologically,” in Louise J. Lawrence and Mario I. Aguilar (eds.), *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach*, (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 22.

considering a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement. For example, a scientific approach to "the other" challenges the theological view of humanity as made in the divine image with its encumbered notions of original sin.[16] In addition, the significance of relationships between cultural groups suggested by Lawrence's statement challenges the kinds of narratives adopted by Reformed theologians which promote separation, stimulating questions about human social responsibility and justice.[17] Finally, the fluid and complex nature of cultural realities suggested by an anthropological view of "the other" challenges theological ideas of sin and depravity, as well as eschatological questions about the passage of time and the direction of history.[18] These examples demonstrate the possibility for growth and change in an approach to Christian cultural engagement that is formed through a dialogical exchange between cultural anthropology and theology.[19]

1.2.2 The role of dialogue in cultural anthropology

Ethnographer Stephen Tyler refers to the role that dialogue plays in writing about "culture" (ethnography) by comparing ethnography to poetry in the sense that the poet knows that they can never fully capture an idea or an object absolutely.[20] Instead a poet evokes a sense of an idea, a feeling, or an

[16] For a Calvinist description of humanity made in the image of God see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 106.

[17] The idea of a narrative of idolatry in cultural analysis will be explored later in this chapter, an approach taken by theologians Daniel Strange and Ted Turnau.

[18] Abraham Kuyper's view of the progression of history was two-fold. Firstly, it was negative in the sense that he predicted (according to his interpretation of Scripture) that common grace which restrained the full effects of sin in creation would cease to have any influence over the internal lives of non-Christian human beings, and although humanity continued to develop culturally, this would be motivated by usurping God once and for all. Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God's Gifts For A Fallen World*, *Vol. 1, The Historical Section*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, in *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works of Public Theology*, *Series 2*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Iowa: Acton Institute; Lexham Press, 2016), 540-542. Secondly, Kuyper's view was positive: at Christ's return, the fruit of common grace (cultural development) would be renewed and transformed to be fit to continue in the new creation. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 544. Both perspectives affirm that for Kuyper, human cultural activity was of great significance.

[19] In Chapter Four I will outline the relationship between theology and cultural anthropology in more detail and demonstrate how this thesis stands in the ongoing relationship between the two.

[20] Clifford argues that this is not at the expense of accuracy or history, and that poetry need not be in opposition to prose. The point is that "ethnography is hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines." Clifford, "Introduction," 26.

experience that is then taken up by the reader's interpretation.[21] In the same way, ethnographers cannot absolutely say everything there is to say about a "culture" but must use their words, and the words of others, to evoke the sense of a "culture."[22] Here is his description in full:

> A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect.[23]

A cooperatively evolved text requires different voices that together create different shapes on the landscape of a "culture." This cooperatively evolved text seeks change and transformation; this is in accordance with the aim of this thesis to develop a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology in order to transform the practice of theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

1.2.3 The particularity of neo-Calvinism

While anthropology and Christian theology in general have a historical relationship, however awkward that may be, the particular theological and dialogical focus in this thesis in on neo-Calvinism which traces its roots to Abraham Kuyper and the Dutch Reformed tradition.[24] As will explained further in this thesis, Kuyper's view of reality depended upon the sovereign rule of Christ over all things: "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry:

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[21] Tyler refers to the original use of poetry which "evoked memories of the *ethos* of the community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically." Stephen Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1984), 126.

[22] The effect is to be transformative in nature. The reader is drawn into the fantastical world evoked by the ethnographer and transformed by the experience. See e.g., Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 126.

[23] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125.

[24] Anthropologist Joel Robbins refers to the relationship between theology and anthropology as awkward primarily in terms of the idea of "otherness" which, Robbins argues, is a feature of theology that "mocks" anthropology. I will explore this idea of "otherness" in Chapter Four. Joel Robbins, "Social Thought and Commentary: Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 287-288.

"Mine!"."[25] This meant that Christ was Lord not only of the church and of "spiritual" matters, but of the totality of life in creation. In Kuyper's view, because of Christ's rule, the dispensation of God's common grace sustained the whole of life and restrained it from degenerating fully as a consequence of sin.[26] This included the domain of science which, because of common grace, retains its value and integrity even when undertaken by non-Christians.[27] There is a crucial difference between a modern science that has developed from an acceptance of Darwinian evolution and the theological study of the spiritual realm, and from a Kuyperian perspective this difference should not be undermined.[28] However, this thesis does not seek to convert cultural anthropology or to illegitimately appropriate parts of the discipline to support certain theological points: based on a Kuyperian worldview cultural anthropology speaks for itself from its own starting point and is approached as the cultural "other" for the purposes of dialogue.[29] As will be evident in the literature reviews, with its emphasis on plurality and liberty of conscience, neo-Calvinism is predisposed to embrace intertextuality between theology and cultural anthropology.[30] This intertextuality is vital to establishing a dialogical

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[25] Kuyper made this cosmic statement during the inaugural speech of the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam. Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty (1880)," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 488.

[26] Common grace is distinct from saving grace "which in the end abolishes sin and completely undoes its consequences." Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace (1902-4)," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998),168.

[27] Kuyper was perspicuous in his conviction that only *Christian* scientists were truly able to "rethink" God's thoughts about creation because they viewed the subjects of scientific research in the broader, spiritual context of God's kingdom. However, this did not negate the achievements of non-Christian scientists; it was a recognition of the level of understanding that scientists could bring to their work. See e.g., Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science (1904)," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 448-449.

[28] A crucial difference lies in the issue of predestination. Kuyper asserts that empiricism itself is not true science because it does not seek to interpret a unifying will or plan behind its observations. The Calvinist life-view, in contrast, begins with the acknowledgement of the impact of God's decrees on an individual's life. Herein lies the difference in starting points for cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism. See e.g., Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (n.p.: CreateSpace, 2012),83, 85.

[29] Kuyper insisted that Calvinism had "fostered a love of science" because of its emphasis on freedom for science from the control and domination of the Church. In spite of his other insistence that true science is that which has been enlightened by Scripture and the Spirit of God, according to his own worldview the domain of science remained a distinct sphere albeit under the sovereignty of Christ. It is to this view of cultural anthropology as a distinct sphere in its own right that this thesis holds. See e.g., Kuyper, *Lectures*, 82, and Kuyper, "Common Grace and Science," 457-458.

[30] In his reflections upon science Kuyper states that God's original creation plan had always involved pluriformity, not uniformity. He writes: "Therefore, we can conclude only that the rich differences in nature and talent among people came forth from creation itself and belong to

relationship between the two disciplines in order to renew Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

1.2.4 Dialogue in neo-Calvinism

One of the significant characteristics of neo-Calvinism is its commitment to the continual reapplication of theological principles to contemporary cultural realities, a characteristic which is integral to the movement's original foundations. Rather than simply returning to the past, Kuyper advocated for a tending of the "root of the Calvinist plant" so that it might "bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the times to come."[31] For example, where there has been significant progress in interfaith dialogue, this has been due to a specific neo-Calvinist emphasis on civility, liberty of conscience, and a willingness to understand the "other" from their perspective. For example, in dialogue with Mormons, neo-Calvinist Richard Mouw advocates "a spirit of genuine learning" that may lead to a meaningful and respectful engagement.[32] Neo-Calvinist theologians continue to grapple with progressively more complex cultural crossovers and interactions which is made possible by a continuing commitment to cultural plurality and liberty of conscience *with* a robust orthodox foundation.[33] This is evidenced in the work of emerging neo-Calvinist scholars in the North American and Dutch contexts researching such topics as videogaming, literature, comparative religious dialogue, and fashion.[34] It is also evidenced in Reformed scholars in other parts of the world – in South Africa, for example – wrestling with a Kuyperian legacy in a post-colonial, post-apartheid setting.[35] Reformed, neo-Calvinist scholars continue to develop and present

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the essence of human nature. If this be so, it follows that no one single person has this trait of God's Image in full but that it lies only in the combination of all talent and genius." Kuyper, "Common Grace and Science," 445.

[31] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

[32] Richard J. Mouw, *Adventures in Evangelical Civility: A Lifelong Quest for Common Ground* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2016), 186.

[33] Richard Mouw demonstrates this desire to remain rooted in sound Calvinist doctrine in his chapter entitled, "Concerns about the Journey" in *Adventures in Evangelical Civility*. His concern is that his emphasis upon civility does not encourage "serious theological decline." His answer is to continue being faithful to what God has called him to do and trust in God's sovereignty. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 220-221.

[34] For example, at the 2019 Kuyper Conference, contemporary neo-Calvinist scholar Brad Hickey presented some of his research into Kuyper and videogaming, with the premise that as a cultural phenomenon, videogaming is something that the church must pay attention to.

[35] In his contribution to a 1998 conference in which diverse scholars came together to seek dialogue with each other and with Kuyper's legacy, South African theologian H. Russel

their research, demonstrating this underlying Kuyperian responsibility to continually reassess and reapply Reformed theological ideas to all areas of life.[36]

1.2.5 Interdisciplinary research

As stated above, a collaboration between disciplines which are each other's "other" serves as an illustration of engaging with the cultural other in the pursuit of renewal. However, there is a further justification for bringing together two seemingly polarized disciplines in dialogue, and that is within the context of interdisciplinary research. Interdisciplinary research employs the knowledge of two or more disciplines to answer a complex research question through collaboration. The aim of interdisciplinary research is integration in order to change practice.[37] Interdisciplinarity scholar Julie Thompson Klein refers to Interdisciplinary Research as "a form of boundary work that bridges cognitive and social dynamics of knowledge production in integrative research cultures."[38] She argues that to arrive at practice that is truly "expert" it must come from research that excels in all aspects of collaboration, including conflict and commonness. Most importantly, whatever the outcome of interdisciplinary research, this knowledge is not the property of one specific discipline but is

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Botman explains the impact of Kuyper's theology on both the "liberative" and the "oppressive" traditions in South Africa. I will refer to this article in subsequent chapters because of its challenge to neo-Calvinism and because of Botman's wise analysis of living with and developing Kuyperian ideas in a post-apartheid setting. H. Russel Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan. Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2000), 343.

[36] The annual Kuyper Conference is now held at Calvin College, an institution whose mission statement reads: "Calvin College equips students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world." This is a prime example of the commitment to reapplying Reformed theological principles to all aspects of life, in ever new and complex contexts. For example, see the Calvin College website: https://calvin.edu/about/who-we-are/.

[37] Transdisciplinary research is similar to interdisciplinarity in the sense that it depends upon communication and collaboration and aims towards integration, but this happens on a bigger and more complex scale which transcends the bounds of disciplines. Michael O'Rourke, professor of philosophy and faculty in AgBioResearch at Michigan State University, categorizes both interdisciplinarity and transdisciliplinarity as Cross-Disciplinary Research (CDR) because of their similarities and a priori of integration through communication and collaboration. Michael O'Rourke, "Comparing Methods for Cross-Disciplinary Research," in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198733522.013.23.

[38] Julie Thompson Klein, "Communication and Collaboration in Interdisciplinary Research" in *Enhancing Communication and Collaboration in Interdisciplinary Research*, ed. Michael O'Rourke, Stephen Cowley, Sanford D. Eigenbrode and J.D. Wulfhorst (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Incorporated, 2015), 2, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483352947.n2.

shared between the collaborators.[39] Interdisciplinary research methods are therefore necessary and useful for tackling greater questions than can be answered by one discipline alone. Along with the outcome-orientation of interdisciplinary methods is the value of the research process itself.[40] Collaboration here is seen in the broadest sense of the word and the practice of it in interdisciplinary research includes all kinds of communication with the aim of taking integrated knowledge and transforming it into new knowledge.[41] Divergence, contrast, complexity, collaboration, integration: these are some of the characteristics which set interdisciplinary research apart from other kinds of research.[42]

1.2.6 Integration of knowledge leads to changed praxis

Interdisciplinary characteristics described above enable a dialogue between two disciplines which have divergent starting points. The aim of this dialogue is more than a compare and contrast exercise: the research process of this thesis aims at building new knowledge and renewing Christian cultural engagement for the sake of the complex, cultural "other".[43] Pahl and Facer use the term

[39] Klein makes the point that interdisciplinary research is imperative in the addressing of complex issues that need more than one viewpoint, particularly when that develops relationship between academics and practitioners. Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinary History, Theory, and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 11.

[40] Annie Balsamo, a researcher and writer focussing on trans and interdisciplinary methods within media and cultural technologies, describes four ethics that should be present in the interdisciplinary research process: intellectual generosity, intellectual confidence, intellectual humility, intellectual flexibility, and intellectual integrity. The ability to see things from another person's perspective, acting generously to different points of view in collaboration, while at the same time being confident and having integrity in one's own knowledge are hallmarks of interdisciplinary research. Annie Balsamo, "An Ethics of Interdisciplinary Research" in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman, 2nd ed., 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198733522.013.23.

[41] Scholars Keri Facer and Kate Pahl iterate the same point; that collaborative research is different to other forms of research because it is not linear and does not lead to a tidy answer to a research question. Facer writes: "Instead, these ways of conducting research are enmeshed, entangled and complex, and are associated with divergent outcomes as well as sometimes difficult experiences and contrasting clusters of ideas." Keri Facer and George McKay, "Series Editors' Foreword," in *Valuing Interdisciplinary Collaborative Research: Beyond Impact*, ed. Keri Facer and Kate Pahl (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), xviii. Building new knowledge is an important characteristic of interdisciplinary research because it demonstrates a true plurality of knowledge.

[42] These methods necessarily lead to methodological pluralism, a hallmark of interdisciplinarity. Kate Pahl and Keri Facer, "Understanding Collaborative Research Practices – a Lexicon," in *Valuing Interdisciplinary Collaborative Research: Beyond Impact*, ed. Keri Facer and Kate Pahl (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), 218.

[43] There are some limitations to this thesis because of its nature as a research document undertaken from a theological perspective by one researcher. For example, it only draws on two disciplines: Reformed theology, from within which the original problem has arisen, and cultural anthropology. Integrating knowledge from other theological traditions, from

"messiness" to describe the uncertainty and "*un*knowing" "not-yet" nature of collaborative research practices implying that interdisciplinarity can be radical and fuzzy.[44] The interdisciplinary nature of the research means that a tidy answer to the theoretical gap in Reformed theology when it comes to relating to "culture" is not the prime target. Neither is a neat answer that ticks the current boxes of Reformed theological cultural engagement as described in the previous section. Instead, what is in view is something new, something that is "not-yet." This "not-yet-ness" that happens as a result of a dialogue between cultural anthropology and the theology of neo-Calvinism will lead to a different approach to the practice of theological cultural engagement.

1.2.7 Co-operation in text evolution

This thesis, as an interdisciplinary body of research in a particular theological tradition, with its development of a dialogue between two distinctly different disciplines in order to create a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement, is akin to Tyler's cooperatively evolved text.[45] Co-operation between authors and to an extent across disciplines, as this thesis suggests, is imperative and that co-operation should lead to the evolution of a text. In other words, drawing together ideas from the field of cultural anthropology and theology should lead to a practice of cultural engagement that is richer and fuller because of the co-operation between disciplines. This sits uncomfortably with the idea that a prescribed doctrinal perspective must have the last word in engaging with cultural matters.[46] This co-operation will inevitably lead to a multiplicity of contributions which may contradict one another; yet these contradictions can be of benefit in evoking cultural engagement and do not

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sociology, archaeology, media and cultural studies for example would broaden the possibilities for new knowledge to emerge to solve the problem of theological cultural engagement. Another limitation is the lack of face-to-face collaboration. This thesis relies on knowledge gathered primarily through literature reviews in the two distinct disciplines which does not allow for some aspects of full collaboration to emerge.

[44] Facer and Pahl describe the following research practices in their Lexicon: productive divergence, materiality, messiness, complexity, praxis, translation, stories, embodied learning. collaborative research practices: productive divergence, materiality, messiness, complexity, praxis, translation, stories, embodied learning. Facer and Pahl, "Lexicon," 218-222.

[45] Tyler explains that in ethnography, dialogue is the preferred method of interaction rather than monologue. The idea of one observer commenting on the observed is rejected: "There is instead the mutual, dialogical production of a discourse, of a story of sorts." Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 126.

[46] An ideal text, according to Tyler, would be "a polyphonic text, none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of a framing story or encompassing synthesis—a discourse in the discourse." Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 126.

necessarily present problems to be solved theologically. However, because this is a *theological* thesis with the aim of developing a *theological* approach to *theological* cultural engagement, theology will have a certain priority in the dialogue.

1.2.8 Co-operation in defining "culture"

What is "culture"? This is the sticking point in theological cultural engagement. Finding an adequate definition of "culture" that captures cultural complexities proved to be a contentious matter in the examples of theological cultural engagement cited above.[47] This theme of the difficulty in defining "culture" absolutely will be returned to throughout the thesis, with an emphasis on how theologians and anthropologists alike approach the fluctuating nature of cultural realities of individuals and groups.[48] Neo-Calvinist theologians, and others in the broader Reformed tradition, will have their own explicit or implicit perceptions when they talk about engaging with "culture" and "cultures" theologically. In this thesis, I identify that this issue of defining "culture" is an important consideration in a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement. A discussion of anthropological views of "culture" in relation to neo-Calvinist theology will inform this consideration.

1.2.9 The value of dialogue

This thesis is concerned with pursuing a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition, an approach which takes seriously the complexity of cultural realities. In this section I have outlined some of the advantages of bringing together two disciplines with different, sometimes opposing starting points, using an interdisciplinary, dialogical approach. In the following section I will explore the problem with current theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition that necessitates a renewed approach. I will

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[47] For example, Reformed scholar William Romanowski defines "culture" as "a collection of ideals and beliefs, values and assumptions, that makes up a kind of master plan for living and interpreting life." Interpreting "culture" this way gives theology a concrete object with which to engage. This thesis argues that "culture" is not that simple. William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2007), 49.

[48] Niebuhr states that a theologian "cannot presume to enter into the issues raised by professional anthropologists." He also admits that it is the interpretation of "culture" that is contended by Christians. This thesis does presume to enter into cultural issues raised by anthropologists in order to better understand a variety of interpretations of what might be commonly described as "culture." Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 80.

conclude that a lack of appreciation for cultural complexities in cultural phenomena may a significant contributing factor to the problem with theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. Therefore, it is important for the thesis as a whole to uncover perceptions of "culture" which are interpreted in multiple ways, rather than merely depending on definitions which have already been interpreted through the lens of theology.[49] It is imperative, then, that theology is challenged by anthropology through an interdisciplinary, dialogical method.

1.3 Concerning the Reformed tradition

This thesis is concerned with whether it is possible for the Reformed theological tradition to engage meaningfully with cultural contexts and their cultural phenomena. Theological cultural analysis which is steeped in the Reformed tradition already exists, but as I will demonstrate below this often consists of evaluating specific cultural phenomena (including films, music, books, sport, trends, for example) based on assumptions, observations, and the imposition of a specific doctrinal perspective. In this approach, "culture" does not speak with its own voice as an equal dialogue partner with theology. Also, this approach can preclude the idea that a theological tradition is itself subject to cultural influences and change and not a separate objective unit divorced from its cultural history and contemporary setting; its own cultural complexity is at risk of being ignored.[50] Whether it is possible to renew an approach to Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition that takes the above into consideration is the primary aim of this thesis.

1.3.1 Daniel Strange and subversive fulfilment

British Reformed scholar and professor Daniel Strange is concerned with equipping Christians and emerging church leaders with the resources to

[49] Not all theologians feel the need to define "culture." For example, Richard Mouw refers to cultural contexts, cultural diversity, and cultural units in the application of theology to groups beyond one's own theological sub-group. His quest is not to define "culture" absolutely in order to engage with "it" but to find a sense of commonness within the challenges of both cultural diversity and the inability to adequately define someone's cultural identity. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 133, 140-141.

[50] However, Reformed theologian Donald Carson does acknowledge that Christians cannot escape being part of the "culture" with which they are engaging. D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008), xi.

navigate cultural challenges.[51] To aid this navigation he suggests a model which he terms subversive fulfilment, drawing heavily on the missiological work of J.H. Bavinck.[52] While the application of this model has included the relationship between Christianity and other religions, for the purpose of this introduction I will focus on subversive fulfilment in his approach to cultural analysis.[53] I will begin by describing Strange's motivation behind his approach, followed by an explanation of the subversive fulfilment model, and conclude with a brief critique of the model.

Strange's book on cultural analysis, *Plugged In*, is the culmination of his research and teaching thus far, and demonstrates his commitment to helping Christians to "speak, think and act in a way that honours [Jesus Christ]."[54] To this end he explains why cultural engagement is preferable to boycotting, fighting against, or assimilating into prevailing cultural trends.[55] In equipping Christians to be Christian in their cultural engagement he begins by summarizing how various groups have defined and described "culture." This leads to his own definition of "culture" being "the stories we tell that express meaning about the world."[56] Furthermore, Strange continues his preparation for Christians by explaining why it is important to engage with "culture" and its

[51] Daniel Strange is College Director of Oak Hill Theological College in London.

[52] J.H. Bavinck's theology of missions focusses on his engagement with world religions which has been criticized in recent times for misunderstanding the diverse complexities within belief systems. For example, in his review of *The J.H. Bavinck Reader* (edited by John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and Paul J. Visser), missiologist H.L. Richard writes, "Were Bavinck with us today he would, no doubt, with his editors and the wider academic community, agree that what the long journey of religious studies has determined thus far is that it was a false assumption that there is an essence to religion and religious traditions, which in fact are complex conglomerations of beliefs and traditions that were wrongly labeled as single religions. The assumption about essences influenced Bavinck's terminology about "the East," and mars much of his further analysis of religious traditions." H.L. Richard, "The Missiological Vision of J. H. Bavinck: Religion, Reticence, and Contextual Theology," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 80, https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/31_2_PDFs/IJFM_31_2-Richard.pdf.

[53] Along with Dutch Reformed theologians Hendrick Kraemer and Cornelius Van Til, Strange relies heavily on J.H. Bavinck's theology of missions, and theology of world religions, in his book on engagement with world religions. Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 38.

[54] Strange precedes this by suggesting that Christians ask two questions of cultural phenomena: "how do we know what's right" and "how do we know what's true?" His book, *Plugged In*, is written to help Christians answer those two questions. Daniel Strange, *Plugged In* (n.p.: The Good Book Company, 2019), 13.

[55] Strange, *Plugged In*, 16-17. Strange admits that "culture" is inescapable but suggests that cultural engagement can give Christians greater opportunities to share their faith.

[56] This is an admission that "culture" is not easily defined. However, Strange still opts for a single use word in his application of the concept of "culture" in cultural engagement. Strange, *Plugged In*, 23.

place in the biblical storyline. In doing so he demonstrates again his motivation for theological cultural engagement: “the lordship of Christ. Nothing is more important than that.”[57] In Strange’s sphere of theological training for church leaders in the Reformed tradition his commitment to equipping Christians in cultural analysis is appropriate and important.[58] However, his baseline belief is that “culture” happens as a result of worshipping idols, which leads to his application of the subversive fulfilment model for cultural analysis.[59]

1.3.1 Strange’s subversive fulfilment model for cultural engagement

Despite Strange’s statement that “culture” is not a “thing” but refers to “the stories we tell that express meaning about the world”, he is emphatic that “culture” is also “religion externalised.”[60] So in fact, in Strange’s view, “culture” *is* a thing: it is religion. Because it is religion, it can be treated religiously by comparing it to Christianity with the intention of demonstrating how short it falls of biblical faith in Christ. The presupposition of idolatry shapes the “confront” and “connect” nature of this model of cultural engagement.[61] In the subversive fulfilment model, Christians connect with the stories being told in a particular cultural expression, and then confront the idols within them.[62] There are four steps to this model: “entering”, “exploring”, “exposing”, and “evangelising”, with the last step embodying the idea of subversive fulfilment.[63] While Strange

[57] Strange, *Plugged In*, 37. His positioning of “culture” in biblical theology resonates with traditional Reformed thinking about creation, sin, redemption, and restoration. I will return to these themes throughout the thesis as they form the landscape for understanding neo-Calvinism and the place of cultural engagement within it.

[58] For Strange, the “can I watch?” question is paramount. The cultural contexts of films, songs, even adult colouring books are only part of what influences the answer to that question; one influence among an individual’s character, conscience, and common sense. Strange, *Plugged In*, 80.

[59] Strange’s insistence that idolatry is at the root of all “culture” building comes from his belief that “culture” is always religious. This stems from the view that human beings were created to cultivate creation as a form of worshipping God but that this has been perverted because of sin, leaving humanity with an innate compulsion to continue cultivating (“culture”-building) but as a misdirected form of worship. See e.g., Strange, *Plugged In*, 41, 45, 47-51.

[60] Strange, *Plugged In*, 47.

[61] This theological framework is imposed indiscriminately on “culture.” See e.g., Strange, *Plugged In*, 101.

[62] Strange bases this model on the apostle Paul’s visit to Athens as recorded in Acts 17 in the bible.

[63] The purpose of entering a “culture” is to explore it for idols. Once those idols have been exposed, evangelism can happen as a way of pointing that “culture” (or cultural artefact) to Christ. Strange, *Plugged In*, 119-120.

acknowledges a need for flexibility within this model, there is still little reference to the fluctuating and fluid nature of cultural realities.[64]

Strange's model relies upon his presupposition that "culture" is always religious. Turnau, who is discussed next, shares this presupposition. This leads both to place a heavy emphasis on the existence of idolatry in cultural engagement and to finding ways to subvert those idols to replace them with Christ.[65] There are shades of this attitude in neo-Calvinism with the existence of what is known as the antithesis, which will be discussed in the following chapter, and also in the philosophy of neo-Calvinist scholar Herman Dooyeweerd.[66] I will examine his work in relation to contemporary scholar, Jonathan Chaplin, in Chapter Three, but it is important to emphasise that the religious aspect of "culture" is not new in Reformed theology. Dooyeweerd viewed all aspects of society as having "religious ground motives" which governed their character and direction.[67] This thesis will not directly answer the question of whether or not "culture" is religious because it is concerned with exploring the complexities of cultural realities and how to theologically engage with those complexities.[68] As a cultural work in its own right, Strange's subversive fulfilment model has value, as belonging to a particular type of Reformed theology and also to the sphere of theological education. However, given cultural complexity, the subversive fulfilment model

[64] Strange cites various examples and illustrations of this model including a former student of his who, in a talk for sportspeople, exposed the idol of sport by appealing to the sense of vulnerability shared by those sportspeople. The aim of the talk was to point to Christ as the fulfilment of desire, and to lead the listeners to repentance. While this may be thought of as a traditional evangelistic message, Strange cites it as an example of cultural engagement using the subversive fulfilment model. Strange, *Plugged In*, 126-127.

[65] A further Reformed scholar, James K.A. Smith, has a similar religious approach to cultural phenomena in his three-volume work regarding "cultural liturgies." Although Smith appropriates cultural analysis in his argument regarding liturgy and formation, the deconstruction of "culture" through an idolatry narrative is not treated as an end in itself. Instead, Smith's focus is on Christian formation through desire-reorientation in Christian worship and Christian education and for this reason I have not engaged directly with his work in this thesis. See e.g., James K.A. Smith, *Cultural Liturgies, Vol. 2, Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 109.

[66] Richard Mouw describes Kuyper's view of the antithesis as being the disparity between the effects of sin on humanity and God's purposes for his people. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 61.

[67] Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options*, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 9. Dooyeweerd writes: "The development of western political systems, social structures, sciences, and arts demonstrates time and time again that all the public expressions of society depend upon spiritually dominant cultural powers." Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 11.

[68] As will be explained in the following chapter, neo-Calvinism places emphasis upon the liberty of each sphere in society to live up to its own unique calling. See e.g., Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 24.

with its emphasis on idolatry may prove to be an inadequate tool for cultural engagement, akin to attempting to break up a body of water using a hammer.

1.3.2 Ted Turnau and popular "culture"

Ted Turnau also stands in the orthodox Reformed tradition; he lectures in Cultural Studies and Religion at the Anglo-American University in Prague and his theological thinking has taken place within the sphere of "popular culture." His book, *Popologetics*, is his attempt to coherently place the relationship between popular culture, the imagination, and the Christian faith.[69] Turnau's interest in "popular culture" lies in its significance for humanity and its religious nature; the fact that it is "not only a sign of the times, but also something of a rudder of the spirit, a touchstone for our deepest desires and aspirations."[70] It is the interface between this all-pervasiveness of "popular culture" and the Christian faith that Turnau addresses by referring to the idea of worldview.

In Turnau's view, the concept of "worldview" is quintessential to both popular "culture" and Christian apologetics and it is the interplay between these worldviews that forms the basis for his approach to cultural theological engagement.[71] His understanding of "worldview" is presuppositional, in that it involves basic beliefs about the world; it is the interplay between the presuppositions of a Christian worldview – which provides the foundation for apologetics – and the presuppositions of a popular "culture" worldview which create the environment for engagement.[72] Turnau argues that our worldviews are shaped specifically by popular "culture" because of the way popular

[69] By way of an explanation he writes: "Popular-cultural engagement and apologetics need each other...I fear that Christian apologists unwittingly contribute to their own perceived irrelevance by presenting arguments that simply do not deal with people where they live." Ted Turnau, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective*, (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2012), xvii.

[70] Turnau, *Popologetics*, xii-xiii.

[71] Turnau qualifies this through acknowledging the limitation of the concept of worldview. For example, one worldview may contain diverse and even contradictory ideas because, as Turnau writes, "worldviews form in conversation with experience." Furthermore, the presence of sin in the lives of worldview holders further complicates the concept of worldview. Turnau, *Popologetics*, 15.

[72] Turnau refers to theologian James Sire's definition of "worldview" which is presuppositional. Turnau, *Popologetics*, 8. Turnau describes worldview presuppositions as being fundamental to everything one knows about reality: "At this level, worldviews are fundamentally *religious*. That is, they are types of faith: they deal with life at the level of deepest commitment." Turnau, *Popologetics*, 10.

"culture" works and it is the role of Christian apologetics to understand and reshape the presuppositions underlying these worldviews.[73]

1.3.3 "Culture" is religious and definable

Part of the pursuit of this thesis is to acknowledge and take into account cultural complexity in all kinds of cultural engagement. In contrast to this, Turnau calls the complex contextual background of popular cultural texts "a huge wild card" that impedes the practice of his apologetic tool: popologetics.[74] This may be related to his theological presupposition when it comes to defining all "culture" and specifically popular "culture" as religious and definable.[75] Because of the religious roots of popular "culture" Turnau suggests that it is possible to see "footprints of God" mixed up with idolatry.[76] This emphasis on bringing the gospel to bear on the idolatrous aspects of popular "culture" and on retelling a story according to the biblical story, is resonant with Strange's approach to cultural engagement.[77] For example, Turnau suggests that in order to deconstruct an idolatrous worldview behind a popular cultural text, "there really is no substitute for a good knowledge of Scripture that has been thought through to an integrated Christian worldview."[78] Like Strange, Turnau suggests

[73] He speaks of building "meaningful bridges" between popular "culture" and the Christian hope and in doing so develops a "biblical theology of popular culture" using the themes of creation, fall, and redemption as lenses through which to view popular culture. Turnau, *Popologetics,* 39.

[74] In defending his lack of engagement with the contexts of popular cultural works he writes: "I haven't paid much attention to the social contexts and how popular-cultural texts are used because they are so varied. Trying to discern how popular-cultural works mean to individuals is difficult *and* adds a huge wildcard when combined with keeping popologetics simple enough to be usable by ordinary Christians. But such contexts are worth noting." Turnau, *Popologetics*, 320. In effect, this is an admission of the complexities of cultural realities experienced by both the creators and consumers of popular "culture" but it is confined to a paragraph towards the end of the book.

[75] Turnau offers his own definition of "culture" being "the human imaging of God's community, communion, and creativity in engaging and responding to the meanings inherent in God's creation (revelation) in order to create "worlds" of shared meanings that glorify God, demonstrate love to other humans, and demonstrate care for the rest of creation." Turnau, *Popologetics*, 59. Like Strange, he categorizes "culture" as a thing: religion.

[76] Turnau does not refer specifically to the antithesis but uses the concept of idolatry to describe the outworking of depravity in humanity. Turnau, *Popologetics*, 68, 70-71.

[77] He refers to the retelling of a story as subversion; this is again similar to Keller's approach, but it sounds more negative in Turnau's work. See, for example, his suggestions for how to deconstruct popular cultural texts: Turnau, *Popologetics*, 290-294.

[78] For the resources to explore this further Turnau refers to neo-Calvinist Al Wolters' book *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* which I will reference in Chapter Six. Turnau, *Popologetics*, 234 (including footnote 33).

that presuppositional theological lenses are needed for cultural analysis.[79] Like Strange, this analysis deals with cultural phenomena (and its idolatrous roots) rather than with complex cultural realities from which cultural artefacts have arisen. Nevertheless, Turnau is realistic in the scope of engaging with "popular culture" and suggests that it will help Christians "enter into the broader cultural conversation that involves you, your family, your friends, the folks you work with, and the folks you relax with."[80] This is a starting point, and as a starting point in the particular sphere of Christian discipleship in the Reformed tradition it has merit, even as it falls short of engaging with complex social contexts behind what is understood as "popular culture."[81]

1.3.4 Donald Carson and Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture"

In this thesis introduction I have chosen to refer to two Reformed theologians whose theological cultural analysis demonstrate a lack of engagement with cultural complexities in their branding of "culture" as religious and idolatrous. I have included the third Reformed theologian, Donald Carson, because of his critique of an influential book (in the Reformed tradition) of the 1950's, *Christ and Culture* by Richard Niebuhr.[82] Carson acknowledges the continued influence of Niebuhr's book on discussions about "culture" in the midst of changing attitudes towards the relationship between Christianity and the contemporary cultural landscape. Carson's book is concerned with critiquing Niebuhr and then offering alternative suggestions for how biblical theology should shape cultural engagement.[83]

1.3.5 Niebuhr's typology

In the original book, Niebuhr takes a typological approach to his analysis of Christian theology and "culture."[84] He acknowledges that this model for

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[79] He writes, "In other words, ask specifically theological questions of the world of the text, and see where it leads. Likely, you will be led to the core idol, or complex of idols." Turnau, *Popologetics*, 235.

[80] Turnau, *Popologetics*, xix.

[81] Turnau writes that the "book was written to be useful to Christians interested in popular culture" with the acknowledgment that even if the reader is not either of those, there still may be something of use within the pages. Turnau, *Popologetics*, xix.

[82] Donald Carson is New Testament Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and founder of the conservative evangelical think-tank, The Gospel Coalition.

[83] Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, xi.

[84] His choice of using the typological method is due to its ability to include a multiplicity of views and approaches while at the same time forming these diverse avenues into ideal types

theological cultural engagement is not without its limits: typological categories should not be regarded as absolutes, and neither should they be used to determine values.[85] Niebuhr identifies five types of what he calls "Christian ethics" and translates them into his own theological typological categories: 1. Christ against Culture, 2. Christ of Culture, 3. Christ above Culture, 4. Christ and Culture in Paradox, and 5. Christ transforming Culture.[86] Niebuhr writes that this is not a new debate for those who have identified themselves as God's people through the ages because Jesus Christ and his gospel challenges all aspects of social, political, and cultural life.[87] Niebuhr locates the heart of theological cultural engagement as being a problem of tension between making cultural decisions on the basis of faithfulness to a contemporary Christ, and making those decisions in the light of the revelation and historical reality of Christ which is borne witness to in the church across the ages.[88]

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for the purpose of analysis. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (1951; New York: HarperOne, 2001), xxxviii.

[85] Niebuhr writes that the typologist's "enterprise is directed toward neither explanation nor evaluation, but toward understanding and appreciation." Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, xxxix. In using this approach Niebuhr is consciously referencing Carl Jung amongst other philosophers in his attempt to distinguish one type of Christian theology from another. See e.g., Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, xli.

[86] His rationale for this work was the "many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization" of his contemporary context. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1. The results of each theological approach are insufficient for a true and meaningful cultural engagement: "Christ against Culture" results in a dualism that affects the believer's understanding of the biblical Christ; the "Christ of Culture" approach results in a cultural accommodation of the biblical Christ leading to a weakened view of sin and grace; "Christ above Culture" in its attempt to synthesize the rule of Christ with the cultural climate of the day, incurs the risk of becoming a humanistic and anthropocentric effort; the "Christ and Culture in Paradox" typology is a truly dualist position leading either to antinomianism or conservatism; in the "Christ transforming Culture" approach has elements of synthesis and dualism, and is the approach with which Niebuhr appears to have the most empathy, although he raises the risk of universality in term of redemption.

[87] The main issues seem to lie in the Christian's attitude towards temporal life: the hope of eternal life subjugates human endeavour to build civilisations; reliance upon God's grace for the whole of life demotivates human effort; the exclusive claims of Christ necessitate intolerance towards counter-claims. All three of these fundamentals apparently threaten the building and maintaining of civilisations and societies. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 4-9.

[88] In many ways this is simply an issue of authority; whether Christ's authority, or human authority. However, even taking Christ's authority into account still raises issues of interpretation and contemporary application. Niebuhr does not give definite answers, but couches everything in the idea of "faithfulness" to the Christ of the present and the past. See e.g., Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 248, 253-256.

1.3.6 Carson's critique of Niebuhr

Carson's critique of Niebuhr is grounded in his concern for biblical faithfulness; specifically, faithfulness to the "non-negotiables" of the biblical narrative,[89] and suggests that biblical theology is lacking in each of Niebuhr's types.[90] In addition, Carson helpfully highlights the different uses of the word "culture" and argues that our theological cultural thinking needs to take these varying uses into consideration, along with all the various theological approaches that Christians take in their cultural engagement. Here is an acknowledgement of cultural complexities but Carson is still clear that such complexities must be in subjection to biblical theology.[91] Similarly to Turnau and Strange, and in faithfulness to the Reformed tradition, Carson emphasises the tension between the cosmic sovereignty of God and the reality that not all human beings recognise that sovereignty and actively live in opposition to it.[92]

1.3.7 A useful lens for neo-Calvinism

Carson stands in the more conservative camp of the Reformed tradition and it is useful in this Introduction to consider his critique of Niebuhr's work in contrast to a neo-Calvinist view. This helps to demonstrate the different approaches within the Reformed tradition and also demonstrates the distinction between neo-Calvinism as a discreet movement in the tradition, and other theological perspectives. Preeminent neo-Calvinist scholar, Richard Mouw, whose work will feature in Chapter Three, shows support for Carson's critique particularly in his identification of Niebuhr's weakness in biblical theology.[93] In addition, Mouw

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[89] These are the plotlines of creation, fall, the giving of the law to Israel, Christ's incarnation and redemption, and heaven and hell. Carson suggests that the entirety of the Bible's storyline needs to be included in any discussion about Christ and culture." See e.g., Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 45.

[90] He writes, "In short, it appears that some, and perhaps all, of Niebuhr's five patterns need to be trimmed in some way, by reflection on the broader realities of biblical-theological developments." Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 60.

[91] For example, Niebuhr's typologies do not represent alternative approaches but each should be subjected to Scriptural examination to see the context and reasoning and possible use of each one, as they appear in Scripture. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 61.

[92] At all times and in all places Christian are called to proclaim the sovereign and saving grace of Jesus Christ, whatever the reaction of their immediate cultural setting. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 64-65.

[93] It is important to note that Mouw find some of Niebuhr's descriptions and affirmations problematic, along with Carson, but this does not appear to seriously affect the practical value of Niebuhr's typologies. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 70. However, Mouw defends Niebuhr's "Christendom" motif by explaining that he was writing in a very particular cultural context which is different to our own, whether or not we would attach the label of "Christendom" to it. In doing

warns against a simplified approach to cultural engagement, such as a typological model, and suggests an openness to different approaches that leads to dialogue.[94] However, in general Mouw finds the accuracy of the typological descriptions helpful, and identifies most closely with the "Christ Transforming Culture" typology.[95] It is interesting to note that Strange, Turnau, Carson, Niebuhr, and Mouw all stand within the Reformed tradition, yet there are differences within this tradition in attempts to undertake cultural analysis theologically. Subsequently, this thesis will argue that neo-Calvinist ideas of cultural engagement offer the most helpful approaches, informed by a dialogue with cultural anthropology.

1.3.8 Criticisms of the above approaches

As evidenced by the above examples, the pursuit of a meaningful theological cultural engagement has often resulted in "culture" being understood as a single object to be dissected and analysed. Once "culture" has been decoded, interpreted, and understood (or exposed and subverted), "culture" may then be passed through the Reformed theological lens in order to ascertain which parts may be kept and which should be avoided. Sieving a "culture's" constituent parts in this way allows Reformed theology to impose its belief-system upon a single entity termed "culture" by paying little substantial attention to fluctuating cultural complexities.

This thesis argues that such an approach fails to take into consideration complex layers of cultural processes and sociological interactions inherent in what is perceived as "culture." Through a review of neo-Calvinist theological ideas, and the concerns of cultural anthropological ideas of "culture", I will show that the above methods fall short of engaging with the pluralism inherent in different cultural movements and instead suggest hints of colonisation in the

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so Mouw invokes another Reformed thinker, Lesslie Newbiggin, who suggested that whatever cultural setting the church finds itself in it continues to have a mission. Mouw, *Adventures*, 71-72.

[94] Mouw refers to his ecumenical debates, particularly with those of an Anabaptist inclination, as helping with clarity and with moving forward in thinking about how to interact theologically and culturally. This seems to be strategically a neo-Calvinist approach. Mouw, *Adventures*, 72-75.

[95] It is important to note that Mouw find some of Niebuhr's descriptions and affirmations problematic, along with Carson, but this does not appear to seriously affect the practical value of Niebuhr's typologies. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 70.

way theology is applied culturally. A study of cultural anthropological ideas will demonstrate that all theological movements are birthed in a particular cultural context, and evolve continually through cultural change, and that this includes the Reformed tradition. This thesis is concerned with renewing an approach to Christian cultural engagement that takes into account these fluctuating layers of cultural complexity while remaining faithful to the Reformed tradition through neo-Calvinist theological ideas.

1.4 A Renewed Approach to Theological Cultural Engagement

As outlined in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology will lead to a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement that considers the following three themes: 1) Cultural engagement requires an acknowledgment that the cultural worlds we inhabit are both meaningful and undefinable; 2) Cultural complexity requires the holding of multiple perspectives, therefore engagement must be contextual in nature, while remaining faithful to the tradition; 3) Theological cultural engagement that is founded upon a positive view of creation gives cultural works and human cultural development meaning and a future purpose. These themes will feature in each chapter, and I will develop them fully in Chapter Six, demonstrating how this renewed approach to theological cultural engagement is able to give meaning to the development of cultural worlds without stultifying them, how it is able to support the multiplex nature of cultural diversity while remaining faithful to the tradition, and how it is able to give hope and meaning to the works of diverse cultural communities.[96]

1.4.1 An approach that answers the primary research question

This thesis suggests that there is a problem in existing theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition; the problem is that "culture" is viewed as a problem outside of the Christian faith, which needs to be solved by theology.[97]

[96] In some respects, these characteristics of cultural engagement are already present in Kuyper's theology; his commitment to "cultural activism" in all areas of life supported complexity, multiformity, and the future of cultural development in Christ. See e.g., Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 195, 201.

[97] In contrast, Kuyper's worldview saw all of "culture" as being under Christ's sovereignty. As will be outlined in Chapter Two his cultural theology emphasised cultural renewal. This is a different approach to seeing "culture" as being something outside of the

Cultural values, cultural trends, cultural artefacts, cultural identities are considered to be solely religious in nature, and idolatrous in expression.[98] The primary research question of this thesis is whether or not it is possible to develop a way of engaging theologically and culturally that takes into account the complex cultural contexts of individuals, groups, traditions, works, beliefs and behaviours. I suggest that entering the field of cultural anthropology and gaining understanding from within this discipline provides the lens through which to clearly perceive how this kind of theological cultural engagement may be developed.[99]

1.4.2 An approach with integrated perspectives

Emerging from the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology, the renewed approach will put forward different perspectives in theological cultural engagement that answer the primary research question. For example, these perspectives will highlight the difficulties surrounding a firm definition of "culture," the complex relationships between cultural worlds, including the cultural world of Reformed theology and the smaller cultural world of neo-Calvinism, between cultural analysts (or ethnographers) and the cultural "other", and between creation and cultural works. These perspectives are not new; they already exist in both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology, but their integration form the foundation for a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement. For example, neo-Calvinism approaches to "culture" respect complexity, diversity, and multiformity, with a commitment to liberty of conscience and public faith in a pluralist society.[100] However, some of these attitudes have not been consistent and require updating, using the lens of

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Christian faith that requires exposing and subverting with theology. See e.g. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 173, 194-196.

[98] For example, in his analysis of Japanese toilets, Strange highlights cultural commitments to "technology, health, cleanliness, and safety" but his theological cultural assessment of them is that "the obsessions surrounding cleanliness and technology with regards to the Japanese toilet show that these have become idols." Strange, *Plugged In*.

[99] Anthropologist and theologian Louise Lawrence describes how the two disciplines of anthropology and theology have been seen as radically opposite to each other; however, in applying anthropological ideas to biblical studies she suggests that this can "unite practice and belief, body and soul, experience and intuition, culture and gospel." Louise J. Lawrence, *Reading With Anthropology: Exhibiting Aspects of New Testament Religion* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), 17-18.

[100] For example, diversity was, for Kuyper, the method by which the image of God would be fully manifested in humanity by virtue of common grace. See e.g., Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 201.

anthropology.[101] Anthropological approaches also respect complexity, diversity, and multiformity, with an emphasis on respecting "the other" in their own right.[102] For the purposes of this thesis these anthropological insights may need re-interpreting through the lens of theology. However, an integration of these perspectives creates the possibility for new approaches that allow cultural realities to engage with theological ideas on equal ground.

1.4.3 A post-cultural approach

In this thesis, through the integration of cultural anthropological and neo-Calvinist ideas, I will move theological cultural engagement away from bounded notions of "culture."[103] By deliberately referring to cultural realities, cultural processes, cultural worlds, cultural contexts, cultural works, cultural phenomena, cultural change, and cultural development, rather than "culture" I am continually affirming cultural complexity. This is what I perceive to be the primary difficulty with theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition; perceiving "culture" as "religion externalised" is a symptom of this problem.[104] First, this approach forces complex cultural realities into a box marked "culture" that can be decoded and understood as one object. Then, because it is a theological approach, the decoding and understanding forces "culture" into a bigger box marked "religious". After the theological revelation that "culture" is "religious" the next step is to denounce all cultural realities as idolatrous in some way so that theology can step in and solve the problem.[105] In this approach,

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[101] Included in this "updating" is the issue of racism in Kuyper's ideas, particularly in sphere sovereignty, and the devastating impact of their application, for example, in South Africa. See e.g., Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 81.

[102] Lawrence explains that this attitude towards "the other" in anthropology was first prioritised by the anthropologist Malinowski. "Otherness" carries with it a responsibility of openness to being changed by an encounter with "the other". Lawrence, *Reading With Anthropology*, 4-5.

[103] For example, Clifford describes the innovative research collated in *Writing Culture* as projecting the view of "culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations." Clifford, "Introduction," 2. This is the view of "culture" that I wish to emulate in this thesis, a view that takes seriously the complex social contexts of cultural activity.

[104] Because of the religious nature of cultural activity, according to Strange, "our culture-making after the Fall cannot properly be called "real culture", because the values and values driving it are so radically different from those established in God's original good creation." Strange, *Plugged In*, 49. In this statement Strange has set up the scenario in which only the imposition of a specific theological worldview can save this false "culture.""culture."

[105] Colonial overtones are strong in Strange's approach to cultural analysis. First, he continues his idolatry narrative by reminding his readers that idol-worship leads to death, which is the destination of all who engage in idolatrous cultural activity. Then, because this reference to death inevitably sets up a binary situation (where non-idolatrous cultural activity will inevitably lead to life) he describes Christians as needing "to be equipped to go into this cosmic culture

there is a danger that many of the complexities that are involved in the creation of cultural works, including the cultural identities of those creating the works and the cultural contexts out of which they have been created, are demeaned, degraded, and dismissed. What these theological approaches are left with in terms of "culture" is a token, a caricature, a myth.

For this reason, theological cultural engagement needs to be post-cultural in nature in the sense that it leaves behind the blanket term "culture."[106] As mentioned above, both cultural anthropological ideas and Kuyperian theology speak into this post-cultural nature of analysis because of their affirmation of cultural complexity and diversity. This does not mean that cultural complexities are without religious inclinations; in fact, there is a sense in which all cultural activity is ideologically driven.[107] It means that analysts are not tempted to boil down cultural activity and the many complexities behind that activity into one, simple, idea. For this reason, as this thesis will suggest, theological cultural engagement needs to be post-cultural.

1.4.4 An approach that explores "otherness"

Part of the outworking of a post-cultural theological cultural engagement is an emphasis on "otherness", which is a concept found in both anthropology and theology.[108] Through a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology I will demonstrate that how the cultural "other" is regarded in cultural analysis is an important indicator of the effectiveness of that analysis. "Otherness" in anthropology carries with it a sense of future possibilities; where

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clash – to make, shape, and engage with culture for the sake of Christ. As we do so, we can know this: we're on the winning side – because the story doesn't end here." Strange, *Plugged In*, 50-51.

[106] I will expand this idea in more detail in Chapter Four: it is founded upon anthropologist and theologian Mario Aguilar's statement that human beings, while sharing many similarities "they do not share a culture." To do so binds individuals to a concept that undermines their individual multiple cultural identities. Mario I. Aguilar, "Changing Models and the "Death" of Culture: A Diachronic and Positive Critique of Socio-scientific Assumptions," in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach*, ed. Louise J. Lawrence and Mario I. Aguilar (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 307.

[107] For example, anthropologist Jack Eller explains that the ideas of "culture" and "tradition" are more rooted in ideology rather than in reality. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 378.

[108] Anthropologist Joel Robbins describes a difference between anthropologists and theologians: on the one hand, anthropologists collect data about how "the other" lives. On the other hand, theologians focus on *how* "the other" might live *differently*. Robbins calls this "the critical force of theology" that mocks anthropology by its confidence that an awareness of a different way to live can lead to transformation. Robbins, "An Awkward Relationship?" 288. This is the foundation for "otherness".

individuals and cultural groups are not bound by ethnographic interpretations of their past or by colonial ideas of development.[109] I will argue that "otherness" can also be found in Kuyperian ideas, specifically, in the concept of sphere sovereignty, with the appropriate cautioning that comes from an acknowledgement of the damage caused by the application of sphere sovereignty to justify apartheid.[110] Just as God has ordained the various spheres in society to live up to their unique callings, so has he ordained individuals to do the same.[111] I will argue that this is not only the basis for liberty of conscience but also for equal rights. When applied to theological cultural engagement, this "otherness" means that "the other" is not bound by the preconceived interpretations of a theologian. It means that "the other" (whether that is an individual, a people group, a cultural work, or any other cultural process) is considered sovereign in their own right, and in dialogue with, not in submission to, theological principles.

1.4.5 An approach that unbinds "the other"

In Chapter Four I will highlight the anthropological idea that what we think of as "culture" is continually in flux.[112] This means that the cultural realities of "the other" are also in flux. For this reason, those who practice theological cultural engagement cannot bind themselves or others to strict cultural interpretations or past cultural traditions. Neither can they bind individuals to theological expectations of how they will behave in the future.[113] An approach that suggests

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[109] For example, anthropologist Will Rollason locates the problem in the attitude that to be poor is to lack something: "Development takes the liberal, democratic, consumer societies of the North as the norm, and defines 'the poor' as figures of lack…Their future as people who have, or should have 'more' is never in doubt." This attitude colours the ethnographic accounts of Pacific peoples and subsequently puts limits on their futures. Will Rollason, "Introduction: Pacific Futures, Methodological Challenges," in *Pacific Futures: Projects, Politics and Interests*, ed. Will Rollason (Berghahn Books, 2014), 4, https://0-www-jstor-org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt9qd15t.

[110] Sphere sovereignty will be explained in detail in the following chapter; briefly this is Kuyper's view that society consists of divinely appointed, organically related spheres which operate in their own right for the mutual flourishing of human beings. See e.g., Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 130.

[111] Kuyper recognised that the right of sovereignty of individual spheres also belonged to individual human beings. He writes, "Each person's calling is not merely to be a human being but to have one's own character." Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded: The Church as Organism and Institution*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian's Library Press, 2013), 32.

[112] This is summed up in Clifford's short sentence that ""cultures" do not sit still for their portraits." Clifford, "Introduction," 10.

[113] Rollason writes: "Just because you can interpret what someone does in terms of the past and a cultural tradition doesn't mean that you must do so." He says this in response to

a post-cultural theological cultural engagement with an emphasis on "otherness" will encourage the holding of simultaneous multiple perspectives, self-awareness of subjective cultural lenses, and actively seeking the good of "the other." When the theologian approaches the cultural "other" like this, remembering that all cultural worlds are complex and diverse, then they adopt a posture of seeking the common good.[114] Awareness of the self's cultural lenses and culturally complex background, and awareness of the cultural complexities of the worlds of "the other" fosters both a sense of unity and a sense of "otherness".[115] This approach to theological cultural engagement respects the unique calling and freedom of "the other" to be diverse and distinct from us, while sharing common traits with us.[116] These ideas are an integration of the concerns of both cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism and provide the content for a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement.

1.5 A Neo-Kuyperian Approach to Theological Cultural Engagement

This thesis is concerned with whether it is possible to develop a meaningful theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition, one that is faithful to the tradition at the same time as taking into the various cultural complexities outlined above. Nevertheless, my third further research question concerns how the thesis is both faithful to and a development of neo-Calvinism. A reapplication, or an updating, of Kuyper for a new context may appropriately be called "neo-Kuyperian."[117] In this section I will suggest three areas in which this thesis may offer a neo-Kuyperian contribution to the tradition: firstly and mainly, in the area of applying Kuyper's sphere sovereignty to cultural complexity in theological cultural engagement; secondly, as a consequence of this

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anthropologist Mark Mosko's account of Melanesians interpreting change and innovation in the light of their past, which makes it impossible for real transformation to take place. Rollason, "Introduction," 7-8.

[114] Mouw refers to a notion of convicted civility which demonstrates care and respect for fellow human beings: to be Christlike in the public square. This is a way of seeking the common good of "the other". See e.g., Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 41.

[115] Mouw implies that it is possible to hold diversity (that which makes us "other") and a sense of commonness (that which relates us as one human race) in tension. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 136, 138-139.

[116] This is a summary of Lawrence's description of anthropology's influence upon theology mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[117] Richard Mouw relates this updating to the Catholic concept of *aggiornamento* in the sense that some areas of Kuyperianism require renewing for contemporary cultural challenges. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 75.

reapplication of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, theological cultural engagement becomes post-cultural in nature; thirdly, a post-cultural reapplication of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty leads to the pursuit of "otherness" in theological cultural engagement.

1.5.1 Sphere sovereignty and cultural complexity

Using a dialogical method, I will bring together the disciplines of cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinist theology. In keeping with Kuyperian language, these distinct disciplines may be thought of as two distinct spheres, sovereign in their own right. The purpose of relating these two spheres in this way in dialogue is to bring about a development of theological cultural engagement. In this sense, these spheres are working together organically to allow a flourishing of both: this is an extension of sphere sovereignty.[118] As a renewed approach is developed from the integration of ideas from both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology it will contribute to both cultural complexity and to the pluriformity required in society for humanity to flourish culturally.[119]

A further extension of sphere sovereignty will occur in the integration of specialist knowledge from neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology as part of the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis. It is vital to note that what it is not being integrated is the two disciplines themselves, the two distinct spheres of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology: an important feature of sphere sovereignty.[120] The distinctions between the two will be preserved through keeping each discipline's distinctive vocabulary in the background, at the same time as using them in an integrated way for problem-solving. Kuyper's sphere sovereignty will be upheld through preserving the different, particular ideas and principles of the two disciplines. At the same time, it will be extended through

[118] The reason they may continue to flourish while working together is because of the sovereignty of each sphere in its own right. In Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, a society would only flourish when its spheres related to each other organically, and distinctly. When spheres flourished, so did the whole of society. Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*, ed. and trans. Harry Von Dyke, in *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works of Public Theology*, *Series 1*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press), 20-21.

[119] Mouw draws attention to Kuyper's love for pluriformity which was founded on Kuyper's belief that "God himself loves many-ness." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 17.

[120] Kuyper was against any kind of encroachment from one sphere onto another. This would "disrupt the entire operation" of an organic society. This is why it is important to preserve the distinctions between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

the integration of specialist knowledge. The boundaries of the two spheres will not be blurred, and neither will their distinctions be collapsed. Instead, my research will show the relevant ideas within both disciplines, and I will take the knowledge gleaned from this research and integrate it to form a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement. In doing so I will demonstrate how Kuyper's sphere sovereignty forms a useful theological foundation for interdisciplinary research.

1.5.2 Sphere sovereignty, cultural complexity, and multiple perspectives

Kuyper's commitment to sphere sovereignty was at the heart of his cultural engagement. For Christians to be involved in cultural renewal they had to be operating in every sphere of society. For Kuyper, society was necessarily pluralist, a view that required the holding of multiple perspectives at the same time. By implication, the same would be true at the individual level.[121] However, Kuyper's sphere sovereignty requires updating and revisiting to ascertain whether it is still appropriate to apply it in cultural engagement, and whether an emphasis on cultural complexity can aid in its application.[122] Like the idea of pluriformity, culltural complexity requires the holding of multiple views simultaneously. Cultural complexity works on both a collective level, with cultural groups not bound to past traditions for example, and on an individual level, where a member of a cultural group is not bound by other cultural groups to past traditions in their future. An anthropological view of the fluid nature of cultural realities and processes, and the cultural works that flow from them is somewhat reflected already in Kuyperian sphere sovereignty, but this thesis pushes that reflection into something more through bringing together Kuyper's ideas with anthropological ideas. As in the previous section, this is not a blurring of the boundaries of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology; it is a sharing together of knowledge in order to approach the problem of theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

[121] Kuyper did not just refer to abstract concepts in sphere sovereignty, he also included the individual members of spheres. For example, in speaking of how the state is to uphold "the free movement of life in and for every sphere," Kuyper intends this to be a protection for individuals who may suffer "tyranny from their own circle." Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

[122] As mentioned above, perhaps the most significant area in continual need of re-evaluation is race. Mouw suggests that a cross-cultural approach is helpful in updating Kuyperian concepts that have led to segregation and oppression. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 83.

1.5.3 Post-cultural theological cultural engagement

In anthropological terms, being post-cultural broadly means that ethnographers resist binding cultural groups to their notions of what those cultural groups will produce in the future based on the past.[123] This begins with the acknowledgment that the word "culture" as a general catch-all description for many complex realities is inadequate. I will expand this indefinability of "culture" in Chapter Four in a survey of contemporary cultural anthropological ideas. Cultural change is accepted as an inevitable factor in post-cultural anthropology, but this is not analogous to modern notions of development.[124] However, Kuyper viewed humanity as journeying towards cultural development by virtue of the Calvinist life-system; this was the future – the end goal.[125] Is it possible to hold both of these ideas in tension in a post-cultural approach to theological cultural engagement? Here is an example where divergence in interdisciplinary research can prove a helpful tool in the sense that cultural change and cultural development may be correctives for each other.

1.5.4 Post-cultural liberty of conscience

Kuyper's historical context and Dutch nationalistic spirit may appear to preclude the existence of any sense of post-cultural sentiment in his ideas.[126] Nevertheless, there is some hope for a development of post-cultural cultural engagement in his emphasis on liberty of conscience and equal rights for all as well as his call for Christians to be involved in alleviating poverty. Kuyper was deeply moved by the plight of the working classes in the Netherlands, but he was also deeply committed to the upholding and preservation of distinct

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[123] Instead ethnographers give faithful accounts of what individuals and cultural groups are actively doing now to secure a future that may not be interpreted in light of past cultural traditions. See e.g., Joel Robbins, "Is the Future Beyond Culture?" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. 3 (2016): 709.

[124] Anthropologist Will Rollason objects to ethnographers affirming notions of development that place economic growth from a capitalist perspective as the prime developmental aim for cultural groups, such as Pacific peoples. Rollason, "Introduction," 2-3.

[125] Kuyper asserted that it was only Calvinism that had allowed human cultural achievements to have reached such lofty heights already and that it would continue to lead cultural development into the future. See e.g., Kuyper, *Lectures*, 26.

[126] Something of a nationalistic spirit is seen in Kuyper's description of defending one's nation: he is almost dismissive of the xenophobia that might stem from a nationalistic pride and views an attitude of national loyalty intrinsic to an understanding of difference between and separation of nations. However, once again, Kuyper's concern is not merely that the nations see themselves as differentiated parts of a family of nations, but so that there might be a unity of nations under the sovereign rule of God. See e.g., Kuyper, *Our Program*, 272-273.

spheres in society.[127] As a statesman he was interested in pursuing justice through the establishment of labour policies; as a Christian pastor he was interested in the souls of the poor; as a theologian he was interested in preserving the inherent dignity of all citizens.[128] Notwithstanding his support of colonisation he advocated for fair labour and proper stewardship of creation.[129] At the heart of these strivings was Kuyper's commitment to liberty of conscience in which lies the potential for seeing cultural groups as non-bounded by other cultural groups; with all cultural groups equally free to flourish in their own right *but* also free to integrate and interrelate with each other for the full flourishing and development of humanity. The trajectory is post-cultural: it is the unity (not uniformity) of the human race in its full diversity.[130]

1.5.5 Post-cultural pluriformity

This thesis is concerned with renewing Christian cultural engagement by taking into account the effect of cultural complexities on individuals and members of diverse cultural groups, and the cultural works and they produce. As outlined above, Kuyper's commitment to liberty of conscience and equal rights for all citizens demonstrates at least an acknowledgment of the necessity and benefits of cultural complexities in society. In addition, sphere sovereignty also shows that cultural complexities are not at odds with theological faithfulness. Kuyper emphasised faith in the public square while maintaining the right of other, non-Christian groups to also express their faith publicly; in this regard, sphere sovereignty brooked no discrimination. Kuyper certainly argued and fought for Christian spheres of influence in society, but they were for the flourishing of

[127] Kuyper determined that "state and society each has its own sphere." The only path to a "free society" was not through the state imposing false social structures on society but by upholding the authority of both. Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James Skillen (Iowa: Dordt College Press, 2011), 60.

[128] For example, Kuyper's speech on poverty was aimed at Christians. It was their God-given duty to alleviate conditions of the working classes, not merely through aid, leadership, and whatever else was in their power, but more importantly through a change of heart that viewed "the poorest" as their "own flesh and blood." Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 67.

[129] For example, Kuyper condemns government policies which subject the peoples of overseas colonies to slavery through removing their liberty and exploiting their labour. Kuyper, *Our Program*, 300-301.

[130] Mouw draws attention to this in his contrast between the biblical narratives of Babel and Pentecost: Babel condemns the human race to "irreducible" diversity whereas Pentecost releases communication and understanding even in the midst of diversity. Mouw, *Adventures*, 137. In this view, diversity does not end in separation and difference but in healing and unity.

society as a whole, not as a means of retraction from society.[131] For a society on any level – local, national, and global – to flourish, change was inevitable. While Kuyper was committed to the preservation of distinctions between spheres, he was also committed to the kind of change that brings renewal, and I suggest that this demonstrates that an attitude of non-binding towards spheres and individual members of those spheres. For cultural renewal to take place, individual members of spheres cannot be bound to the past principles and beliefs of those spheres otherwise their futures would simply be repetitions and imitations of past behaviours. Through anthropological lenses, individuals are not bound to the past cultural traditions of their cultural groups but are free to choose new futures. For this further reason, I suggest that Kuyper's commitment to pluriformity and cultural renewal demonstrates a post-cultural character to his cultural engagement.

1.5.6 Does Kuyperian "otherness" exist?

Because of the seeds of post-cultural cultural engagement in Kuyperianism where there is liberty of conscience for all, where cultural groups, and individual members of cultural groups are free to develop and flourish in their own right, it is tempting to import the idea of "otherness". Defending the individual authority of spheres along with liberty of conscience for all citizens, whatever their religious beliefs, and advocating for a free society with equal rights for all are principles which, although they are pluralist, are built soundly on Calvinism as a life system, and may be interpreted through the lens of "otherness".[132] However, given the evils of applying the separation motif of sphere sovereignty to extreme lengths in societies is it appropriate to suggest that "otherness" might be found in the concept? I suggest that a wider view of "otherness" in Kuyper's

[131] For example, Kuyper's pursuit of a university free from the claims of the state was driven by his sphere sovereignty. By establishing an academic institution founded on Calvinist principles, Kuyper was leading society in a resistance against the absolute authority of the state. In the University's inaugural speech he states: "By an iron necessity of an inner life-impulse what we see today had to come: the launching of this vessel, small and unseaworthy to be sure, but chartered under the sovereignty of King Jesus and expecting to show in every port of knowledge the flag of "sphere sovereignty"!" Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 472.

[132] For example, contemporary neo-Calvinist scholar Matthew Kaemingk draws attention to how an understanding of "a complex Christ" can lead Christians to "walk with their Muslim neighbours in a complex variety of ways, and each of their unique calling will reflect a different facet of Christ's complex mission." Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 193.

theological and Christological foundations provides a useful guide in discerning it in sphere sovereignty.

1.5.7 Christological foundations of "otherness"

In Chapter Four I will explain the place of "otherness" in cultural anthropology. However, while an emphasis on "the other" is an anthropological concern, it is clear from Kuyper that its roots are in the Christian faith. For example, in his speech on poverty, Kuyper urges his listeners to consider how Christ became poor so that we might become rich, and that this should be the basis for tackling poverty. Christ is the prime example of "otherness" in showing "divine compassion, sympathy, a suffering *with* us and *for* us – that was the mystery of Golgotha."[133] To become "the other", as Christ did in his incarnation, is the fullest expression of "otherness". Furthermore, Kuyper subjugated his view of reality in all its complexity and pluriformity to the sovereignty and unity found in Christ: all things hold together in him, and all things are restored in him.[134] That Christ is both Creator (as the eternal Word and second person of the Trinity) and Re-Creator (as Son of Man and Saviour) is quintessential to the totality of Kuyper's theology, reconciling nature and grace in the totality of creation and human experience.[135] If Kuyperian "otherness" exists, it is located in this Christological foundation, which forms the basis for sphere sovereignty, rather than solely in sphere sovereignty itself.

1.5.8 "Otherness" in the Calvinist life-system

In Chapter Six, I will suggest four characteristics present in Kuyper's Calvinism that might form the basis for pursuing otherness in theological cultural engagement. These four characteristics are justice, mercy, humility, and hospitality. I will draw these four characteristics from the principles outlined above which are found either implicitly or explicitly in Kuyperianism and subsequent neo-Calvinist developments. For example, they exist in the

[133] Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 69.

[134] The whole world at its very heart "has been redeemed and saved by Christ." This was Kuyper's impetus for Christian cultural engagement. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 53.

[135] If this were not so then Christ would be only ruler and redeemer for the experiences of the human soul, not for the whole of life: Kuyper refers to this as "inner unreality." Instead, Christ rules over all things because he is Creator and Re-Creator. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 172-173.

commitment to commonness and civility, in the pursuit of public justice, and in the principle of cultural pluralism. They also exist in what Kuyper believed to be the goal of the Calvinist life-system: "to push the development of this world to an even higher stage."[136] This development depends upon mulitiformity (complexity), at the same time as a sense of commonness and equality before God.[137] Once again, it is dependent upon Christ as both Creator and Re-Creator, holding together and reconciling grace and nature, along with human diversity. In this view it is possible to at the same time *both* affirm an individual's right to be distinct from others, *and* their equal standing and commonness with others for the fullest expression of human flourishing, leading to an attitude of "otherness".[138]

1.6 Conclusion: Approaching the Complex, Cultural "Other"

Developing a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition that demonstrates faithfulness to the tradition's theological principles at the same time as upholding the cultural complexity of "the other", is the primary aim of this thesis. In this Chapter I have given examples of where current Reformed theological cultural analysis has fallen short through not giving due credit to cultural complexity. An emphasis on one theological element in "culture" – idolatry – has led to a collapsing of distinctions between the multiple cultural realities that stand behind cultural works. This is not to undermine the reality of sin at work in human cultural activity; to do so would be anti-Kuyperian, but a playing down of cultural complexity and the work of common grace is also anti-Kuyperian.[139] In response I have suggested how this might be overcome with an approach to theological cultural engagement that has been developed from a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. Before this dialogue can take place, I will review neo-Calvinism first in its historic and then its contemporary context in relation to cultural

[136] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 53.

[137] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16-17.

[138] This is an echo of Lawrence's statement that anthropology helps us see "the other" neither "as cultural copies of ourselves" nor "as radically "other" from us." Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[139] Kuyper refers to Calvin's formulation of a grace that restrains the effects of sin on humanity: good exists outside of the church, yet somehow this exists alongside sin. This was what led to an understanding of common grace. Kuyper writes: "This grace is neither an everlasting grace nor a saving grace, but a temporal grace *for the restraint of ruin that lurks within sin*." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 9 (author's italics).

complexity and the pursuit of "otherness" as discussed above. This will be followed by a survey of contemporary debates surrounding cultural complexity in cultural anthropology, with a further survey of "otherness" and post-cultural anthropology. Having laid the foundation, the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology will be concerned with the following points: 1) the problem with defining "culture", 2) the necessity for holding multiple perspectives because of cultural complexity, and 3) the pursuit of a positive view of creation and cultural works.

1.6.1 Cultural complexity and "otherness"

The purpose of dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism is to bring together a wealth of ideas and knowledge which can act as corrective lenses to the current state of theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. Integrating ideas concerning cultural complexity, self-awareness, "otherness", and unity in diversity will lead to a more systematic approach to theological cultural engagement. This approach will be formed through three areas which reflect the concerns of this thesis throughout: firstly, that cultural worlds (or spheres) are at the same time meaningful and indefinable; secondly, that theological cultural engagement must be both contextual and faithful to the tradition; thirdly, that a positive view of creation includes cultivation and harvest. A renewal of Christian cultural engagement must include an emphasis on cultural complexity and "otherness" as vital hallmarks. "Otherness" will also involve a consideration of the characteristics of mercy, justice, humility, and hospitality, and I will demonstrate how these characteristics are either implicitly or explicitly Kuyperian. An emphasis on cultural complexity, on "otherness", and on the four characteristics of mercy, justice, humility, and hospitality take cultural analysis beyond engagement with the more superficial phenomena of "culture" such as films, books, songs, trends, and fashion.[140] Instead they lay the foundation for engagement across different cultural communities, and the

[140] This is not to say that neo-Calvinism does not engage with these phenomena. For example, contemporary neo-Calvinist scholar Brad Hickey's research concerns videogaming; Nicholas Barratt's research concerns literature; Robert Covolo's research concerns fashion. The difference is in their Kuyperian backgrounds which acknowledges cultural complexity as integral to their thinking.

individual members of those communities who produce the cultural phenomena with which theologians such as Strange and Turnau wish to engage.

1.6.2 A post-cultural approach

Finally, I will demonstrate how a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement that has developed from a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology can be post-cultural in character. This new approach will exhibit post-cultural attributes such as cultural complexity and diversity, “otherness”, and a deliberate avoidance of binding individuals and people groups to specific notions of “culture” that inhibit their future transformation. By remaining rooted in the neo-Calvinist theological movement, which itself stands in the broader Reformed tradition, this thesis demonstrates that it is possible to approach the complex cultural “other” through a renewal of Christian cultural engagement.

Chapter Two: Neo-Calvinism in Historical Context

2.1 Introduction: The Roots of Neo-Calvinism

This thesis is concerned with whether it is possible to develop an approach to Christian cultural engagement that takes seriously complex cultural realities. As described in the previous chapter, part of the answer to this primary research question will come through a dialogue between neo-Calvinism as a discrete theological movement in the Reformed tradition and the discipline of cultural anthropology. This chapter is the first part of a literature review beginning with the initial developments of neo-Calvinism in the Dutch Reformed church in the Netherlands in the late 19th century primarily through the theology of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).[141] I will begin with an extended survey of Kuyper's theological ideas in relation to cultural engagement, with a focus on his sphere sovereignty and common grace. Following Kuyper, I will give space to two further early Dutch neo-Calvinists, Herman Bavinck and Klaas Schilder, with commentary on their development of Kuyperian thought.

2.1.1 Kuyperian themes

In this chapter I will explore two major Kuyperian themes: common grace and sphere sovereignty. In addition, I will examine the outworking of common grace and sphere sovereignty in Kuyper's thought through the complex relationships between his understanding of the antithesis, the church as institute and organism, and four distinct terrains of society. I have selected these specific themes because they formed the foundation for the application of neo-Calvinism to contemporary cultural issues in Kuyper's era, and therefore provide the content for a 21st century application of neo-Calvinism to a dialogue with cultural anthropology.[142] I will conclude the section on Kuyper with a brief consideration of some of the more problematic themes in his theology: in particular the idea of

[141] Amongst others, the contemporary neo-Calvinist scholar Richard Mouw, credits Abraham Kuyper with the birth of the neo-Calvinist movement. Richard J. Mouw, *Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 9. While, as this chapter will elucidate, Bavinck and Schilder have developed and critiqued Kuyper's original ideas, it is Kuyper who continues to stand as the father of neo-Calvinism.

[142] Richard Mouw expounds these neo-Calvinist themes with the justification that they constitute much of Kuyper's theological ideas of culture; specifically, "cultural renewal." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 15.

"separateness" in sphere sovereignty that gave impetus to the theological justification of apartheid in South Africa, and Kuyper's general attitude towards other races, along with his views on feminism.[143] This is particularly important for a thesis which seeks to renew Christian cultural engagement to approach the cultural "other" in a way that upholds complexity, equality, and liberty of conscience.

Another contributor to early neo-Calvinism was Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper's younger colleague. While Kuyper's theology was complex and vast, Bavinck inclined towards a more systematic approach as evidenced in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.[144] His contribution to the development of neo-Calvinism has influenced contemporary theologians in the same tradition and therefore merits a review in this chapter. Along with references to Bavinck's *Dogmatics* I will include a brief review of his short book *The Sacrifice of Praise*.[145] I will return to this work in Chapter Six to aid a sense of formation in theological cultural engagement. In addition, I will refer to Klaas Schilder's *Christ and Culture* in which he is critical of Kuyper's emphasis on common grace and places his own greater emphasis on the antithesis. However, Schilder draws on and develops Kuyperian themes in his approach to Christian cultural engagement and, apart from the historical argument for including him in this review, his departure from Kuyper offers an important contrast.[146]

2.1.2 Dutch Reformed roots of neo-Calvinism

Neo-Calvinism developed in the context of the Dutch Reformed church in the latter half of the 19th century primarily by Abraham Kuyper although seeds of Kuyper's thought can be found in the politics of Kuyper's mentor, the Dutch leader of the Antirevolutionary party and devout Calvinist, Guillaume Groen van

[143] This emphasis on "separateness" is drawn out in Botman's critique of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and will be examined further in the following chapter. See e.g., Botman,"Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 348-349.

[144] Richard Mouw draws a comparison between Kuyper's ideas which were developed in the midst of his prolific work as journalist, churchman, and statesman, and Bavinck's more scholarly methods. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 76.

[145] Complimenting Bavinck's scholarly development of neo-Calvinism, *Sacrifice of Praise* was written to encourage believers in their public confession of faith.

[146] Mouw explains that in amongst North American Christians some of Schilder's developments have been wrongly attributed to Kuyper. Amongst these are the use of the phrase "cultural mandate" to describe God's command given to humanity to fill the earth and subdue it, and the advocation of building a specifically Christian "culture" as an alternative to all other cultural expressions.. Mouw, "Klaas Schilder," 286.

Prinsterer (1801-1876).[147] Groen van Prinsterer's early articulation of "sphere sovereignty" in political terms as a description of the working relationship between the sphere of the church and the sphere of the state, was a forerunner of the idea that Kuyper would later develop fully with regard to the organisation and function of society which proceeded from the Reformed doctrine of creation.[148] Firmly rooted in the Dutch Reformed and Calvinist tradition Groen van Prinsterer and his successor, Abraham Kuyper, demonstrated how Calvinism may be applied to all areas of life, society, and cultural situations. In this sense they were updating the Calvinist theological themes that formed the foundation of their Dutch Reformed tradition, thus developing a *neo*-Calvinist approach.

2.1.3 The Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort

In the first instance, then, neo-Calvinism must be understood from within a Dutch Reformed context. A reference to the "Canons of Dort" supplies some of this context, being the outcome of the meeting of the Synod of Dort which met in the Dutch city of Dordrecht in 1618-19.[149] The Synod resulted in a direct rejection of Arminianism and in a confirmation of the earlier Heidelberg Catechism which "is the most widely used and most warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period."[150] The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 evolved through the Reformational period in Europe,[151] and is attributed to German

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[147] Kuyper refers to Groen van Prinsterer's political philosophy in his speech to the Antirevolutionary party in 1891, where he draws attention to what was lacking in Groen's strategy. A political leader and a confessed Calvin, Groen continued to oppose the principles that led to the French Revolution until his death. Abraham Kuyper, "Maranatha (1891)," in James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 216.

[148] Herman Dooyeweerd credits Groen van Prinsterer as the first to speak of ""*souvereiniteit in eigen sfeer*" (sovereignty within its own sphere) with respect to the mutual relation of church and state." Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, 53.

[149] The synod consisted of both Dutch and international delegates from Reformed congregations. It met in order to address the teaching of Jacob Arminius who had raised issues with Calvinism; his followers, known as Arminians, disputed five specific points of Calvinism in the "Remonstrance of 1610." These points referred to the way in which believers were chosen by God and saved through Jesus Christ, and opposed the traditional Calvinist beliefs in unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. The Synod of Dort met to reject Arminianism and to confirm traditional Calvinist teaching on these doctrinal points. This refers to the section on "The Canons of Dort," in Christian Reformed Church (CRC), *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; CRC Publications, 1988), 122.

[150] CRC, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 12.

[151] In fact, the city of Heidelberg, which in the sixteenth century was the capital of the Lower Palatinate principality of the Holy Roman empire, had undergone a significant reformation from Rome's influence, through Lutheranism, and finally coming to a stop in the

theologian Zacharias Ursinas in Heidelberg,[152] at the request of Elector Frederick III, himself a Reformed protestant.[153] However, although the content of the Catechism enjoys a more Calvinist flavour than Lutheran - reflecting the evolution of the Palatinate Reformation - part of Frederick's purpose in commissioning the Catechism was to provide systematic, biblical doctrine around which Reformed Protestant Christians could unite.[154] This unity of language may provide the reason for its popularity as a plethora of translations followed its publication, notably by the Dutch: church historian Karin Maag reflects that "it seems clear that there was a steady clientele for this work across the Reformed Dutch communities."[155]

Indeed, for the Calvinist Dutch fleeing to the northern Netherlandic provinces away from the imposition of Spanish rule in the south in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Heidelberg Catechism served not just as tool for instruction but as spiritual nourishment to Calvinists in exile.[156] For Dutch Reformed Christians, the Heidelberg Catechism is synonymous with their identity as both Dutch and Calvinist, demonstrating the importance of justifying and reaffirming its content when it came under attack from Arminianism in the early seventeenth century, resulting in the Synod of Dort.

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more Calvinist Reformed tradition. This reformation was neither a straightforward nor rapid process, and the Catechism came at the end of half a century of disputations with Luther's *Heidelberg Theses*, and revisions of Melanchthon's *Augsberg Confession*, particularly with regard to the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. See e.g., Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., "The Reformation of the Palatinate and the Heidelberg Catechism, 1500-1562," in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, ed. Lyle D. Bierma, Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 22, 42-44.

[152] Ursinas had received his early theological training at Wittenberg where Melanchthon had replaced Luther as the leader of the German Reformation. He arrived in Heidelberg in 1561 as a student and became professor of Dogmatics in 1562. Despite tradition attributing plural authorship to the Catechism, Lyle Bierma explains how, in the last century, consensus has changed to attribute the greater share of authorship to Ursinus. Lyle D. Bierma, "The Purpose and Authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, ed. Lyle D. Bierma, Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 50, 72-74.

[153] Karin Y. Maag, "Early Editions and Translations of the Heidelberg Catechism," in, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, ed. Lyle D. Bierma, Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 103-104.

[154] The other two purposes were i) to catechize children, and ii) to provide a systematic preaching series to instruct churchgoers. Bierma, "The Purpose and Authorship of the Heidelberg Catechism," 51-52.

[155] Maag, "Early Editions," 107.

[156] Maag, "Early Editions," 107-108.

2.1.4 Putting the "neo" in neo-Calvinism

Theologically, the doctrinal pillars of both the Heidelberg Catechism and the subsequent Synod, substantiated Calvinism as the particular orthodoxy of the Dutch Reformed church, and consequently form the background to Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinist theological developments. For the tradition in which Kuyper stood, the biblical teaching of John Calvin and its doctrinal expositions in Reformed confessions provided humanity with a theological system for every aspect of life including the organisation of society and government.[157] Kuyper sought to apply this theological system to the contemporary issues of his age rather than depart from the orthodoxy contained within the Heidelberg Catechism and the Synod of Dort, and in the teaching of Calvin himself. However, Neo-Calvinist theologian Vincent Bacote explains that the label "neo-Calvinism" was given to Kuyper's work by his opponents: "a title intended to distinguish Kuyper's work from that of John Calvin."[158] Kuyper's commitment was not to replace or change Calvinism beyond recognition but to develop and apply the tradition to a very different historical, social, and cultural context. For Kuyper, Calvinism was a theology of public engagement for the contemporary age.[159]

2.1.5 An emphasis on sovereignty

How did Kuyper develop his neo-Calvinism as a theology for public engagement? A primary way was his application of a Calvinist belief in a sovereign, creating, redeeming, Triune God who is present to all his creation in order to sustain, govern, and bless at all times in history to a society operating under God's sovereignty.[160] This led to his expansion of the doctrine of common

[157] Kuyper's understanding of sphere sovereignty as emanating from creation has consequences for the organisation of society and the place of government within it. Kuyper viewed government as being ordained by God and necessary for human society to flourish. See e.g. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 71.

[158] Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 92. A term first applied critically has been apprehended positively by those following in Kuyper's footsteps.

[159] Bacote defends Kuyper's neo-Calvinism in the sense that although his priority was public engagement, it was not at the expense of the tradition in which he stood. Bacote, *The Spirit*, 87.

[160] Calvin describes God as "providing for the perpetuation of each single species, cherishing some by secret methods, and, as it were, from time to time instilling new vigour into them, and bestowing on others a power of continuing their race, so preventing it from perishing at their own death." John Calvin, *Institutes*, 101. This providential care of God suggests that the Creator is fully present and involved with his creation at all times: "After learning that there is a

grace and the subsequent idea of sphere sovereignty as a basis for cultural development where humanity would develop to its fullest potential.[161] Kuyper's Calvinism was not "new" Calvinism, but a reimagining of orthodox doctrine for a contemporary situation. Kuyper scholar, George Harinck, comments that "the reason that Kuyper today is still of more interest than other Christian social thinkers is that he not only had some interesting thoughts but that he made them work, as well."[162] Kuyper not only changed Dutch society through his ideas and his deeds, his legacy lives on today.

2.1.6 Abraham Kuyper's Calvinism for a changing world

From liberal theologian to convinced Calvinist, Abraham Kuyper influenced both the Dutch Reformed church and Dutch society in general in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[163] Remaining orthodox in the quintessential foundation of Calvinism outlined above, Kuyper transformed doctrinal categories into a worldview that became the basis of a life-system applicable to the changing cultural contexts of Western Europe. James Bratt writes, "He was deeply rooted in classic Reformation theology and tried to convey its full riches to his readers...He did not try to eradicate history but to grow from it."[164] This theological growth upwards and outwards from the roots of historic Calvinist doctrine evolved into what is now termed "neo-Calvinism." Kuyper's Calvinism was forged at the time when liberalism and modernity were emerging from the philosophical landscape through into the cultural, political, and religious foreground. It provided the rationale for his career in the church, as prime minister, as theologian and journalist, and as founder of *de Vrije Universeteit* in Amsterdam. Through Kuyper and his successors, neo-Calvinism went head-to-

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Creator, it must forthwith infer that he is also a Governor and Preserver, and that, not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the globe as well as in each of its parts, but by a special providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest, even to a sparrow." Calvin, *Institutes*, 114.

[161] The human cultivation and development of creation depends upon common grace, which gives rise to what Bacote describes "social-architectural construction;" i.e. sphere sovereignty. Bacote, *The Spirit*, 103.

[162] George Harinck, "A Historian's Comment on the Use of Abraham Kuyper's Idea of Sphere Sovereignty," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 5, no. 1 (2002): 278.

[163] Kuyper's theological training happened in the context of Modernist theology with an emphasis on German Realism. Bratt comments that this influence was significant, for example in Kuyper's emphasis on developing a Christian worldview. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 32.

[164] James D, Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper: His World and Work," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

head with modernity in Dutch society as Western Europe stood on the brink of a new century.

2.1.7 Kuyper's context: church and state, liberal politics, modernity

In the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, the socio-historical movement known as modernity encroached upon all aspects of the Dutch cultural landscape. Liberalism and individuality rivalled pantheism and uniformity in political, social, and religious life. John Bolt writes: "For Abraham Kuyper, the great enemy of the Christian faith in the world of the late nineteenth century was modernism, the powerful, world-shaping vision of human autonomy and scientific reason fashioned by the great thinkers of the eighteenth century Enlightenment."[165] Kuyper viewed modernity as a human-generated and human-centred life-system and referred to the conflict between this and Christianity as "*the* struggle in Europe."[166] From the standpoint of Kuyper's Calvinist theology, he predicted that modernity would result in the collapsing of distinctions between religious belief systems, and the autonomous institutions which protect them. Uniformity and liberalism in the public sphere would remove any claim to absolute truth as secularism had done in the French republic. As evolutionary theory continued to gain ground in the realm of science, based on an anthropocentric view of the cosmos, Kuyper believed it was inevitable that pantheistic beliefs about life would also encroach further and further into the European philosophical mindset. Pantheism would remove the necessity for absolute truth. Pantheistic modernity was the two-fold threat to a Christian view of the world in which God is the exclusive creator, redeemer, and sovereign over the affairs of mankind.

2.1.8 Kuyper's biblical worldview

Kuyper's theological exploration began in this context as a Dutch Reformed minister. Having been influenced by liberal theology in his ministerial training he became convinced of the importance of a personal and individual spiritual relationship with God through "evangelical Calvinism."[167] Spurred on by this

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[165] John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 4.

[166] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 11

[167] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper,* 4.

experience Kuyper began to shape the fundamental biblical doctrines of Calvinism into a *weltanschauung* or "worldview" that he could apply to every aspect of social and cultural spheres.[168] Kuyper decried liberal Christianity, and with it the national church, that had its roots in natural theology, particularly that of Schleiermacher. He also took his stand against the kind of evolutionary process philosophy espoused by Hegel.

2.1.9 The sovereignty of individual spheres

For Kuyper, nowhere did these liberal beliefs manifest themselves more revoltingly than in the theology and practice of the Dutch national church. In his view, the national church's Reformation heredity had now given way to an "ego-theism" that could only be purged through becoming free of the influence of the state.[169] This is an example of Kuyper's worldview: drawing on biblical and Calvinist theology, he believed that within creation different spheres operated in an organic relationship to each other.[170] Crucially, each sphere was sovereign in its own right with the sphere of the state acting in a regulatory and disciplinary role. Kuyper understood that these spheres are upheld through God's common grace and that they are integral to the multi-form nature of the created order. Most importantly, the existence of distinct but related spheres meant that the church and other sectors of society could stand against the rising tide of pantheism, and the blurring of theological, philosophical, and political distinctions that it brought with it. It is important to note, as Harinck does, that Kuyper did not systematically develop his idea of sphere sovereignty at the time but that it was later neo-Calvinists, beginning with Dooyeweerd, who adopted the idea as philosophical theory.[171]

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[168] In commenting on Kuyper's Stone Lectures which he gave in Princeton in 1898, scholar Craig Bartholomew explains that Kuyper intentionally used the phrases ""life-system" and "life-and-worldview"" because *weltanschauung* has no direct English translation. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 106.

[169] Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries (1892)," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 370.

[170] Bartholomew describes Kuyper's passionate belief that "God's sovereign law" should be applied to every part of life; this is what it meant to be a Calvinist. This is what constitutes worldview for Kuyper. Bartholomew, *Contours*, 105.

[171] Harinck, "A Historian's Comment," 279.

2.2 Sphere Sovereignty, Multiformity, and Common Grace

Richard Mouw explains that Kuyper's original Dutch phrase, *soevereiniteit in eigen kring*, evokes the idea of spheres in society having individual characters: "Each cultural sphere has its own place in God's plan for the creation, and each is directly under the divine rule. This is the basic insight of [Kuyper's] theory of sphere sovereignty."[172] Operating "directly under the divine rule" is the crucial point here because for Kuyper it is God's sovereignty which gives spheres their individual sovereignty, implying that no sphere has the right to dominate or rule over another sphere. Given the historical context of Kuyper's theology, sphere sovereignty was vital for the church, for example. Separating the sphere of the institutional church from the domination of the state, and vice versa would, Kuyper believed, liberate the church to become theologically Reformed and morally pure.[173] Kuyper's thinking went beyond the sphere of the institutional church, however: *every* cultural and societal sphere has been given sovereignty in its own right, including the government which should exist to regulate all the spheres in a way which ensures social stability, even down to the level of the individual:

> The cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life. Hence also rises the danger that one sphere in life may encroach on its neighbour like a sticky wheel that shears off one cog after another until the whole operation is disrupted. Hence also the raison d'être for the special sphere of authority that emerged in the State. It must provide for sound mutual interaction among the various spheres, insofar as they are externally manifest, and keep them within just limits. Furthermore, since personal life can be suppressed by the group in which one lives, the state must protect the individual from the tyranny of his own circle... Not to suppress life nor to shackle freedom but to make possible the free movement of life in and for every sphere.[174]

This above quotation from Kuyper stresses the importance of maintaining dignity and order for groups and for individuals in society in order for cultural flourishing to occur but for Kuyper this is not an end in itself. Ultimately each sphere derives

[172] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 23.

[173] Originally, Kuyper referred to just three spheres under God's sovereignty: the state, the church, and society. However, this expanded to include various social spheres including art, science, and education. See e.g., Bacote, *The Spirit*, 80, and Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 40-41.

[174] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

its individual sovereignty from God the Creator.[175] Mouw affirms this when he writes that “all of the cultural spheres are in place - to use a favourite Kuyperian phrase - *coram deo*, before the face of God.”[176] This is true not just for those believe it, i.e. for Christians, but for all human beings everywhere at all times in history; nevertheless Kuyper exhorted Christians specifically to form voluntary societies and associations, and schools, and Kuyper himself founded the *Vrije Universiteit* (the Free University) in Amsterdam on Reformed principles and free from the domination of the church and state. Kuyper had his eye on the supreme goal of cultural flourishing which was for creation to become all that God had originally intended it to be, through Christ who is head over all, and in doing so would benefit the common good.

2.2.1 Multiformity and sphere sovereignty

As this thesis is primarily concerned with establishing a theological cultural engagement which both remains faithful to the Reformed tradition *and* gives respect and dignity to cultural anthropology, this particular theory of Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty is important and as relevant in the 21st century as it was in the 19th. Kuyper, acting from within the Calvinist Reformed tradition, was committed to cultural flourishing and development throughout the whole of creation and it is this commitment that forms the basis of understanding societies as multiform structures, as the above Kuyper quote makes plain. Kuyper understood that human life, and all that issued from it, was rich, diverse, complex, and took many forms. One human being inhabits multiple spheres giving rise to one character performing multiple actions sometimes simultaneously. That one character will inevitably be shaped and will give shape to the multiple spheres within which they operate, creating layer upon layer of complex cultural textures. Therefore, it is clear to see the progression from Kuyper’s theory of sphere sovereignty to his belief in society and human life in general as multiform.

[175] In *Our Program* Kuyper reminds his readers that in terms of the state “the source of sovereign authority does not reside in the law or the will of the people but in God.” This was why personal freedom could be upheld; if it were otherwise the state could legitimately exercise absolute authority over its citizens. Kuyper, *Our Program*, 19.

[176] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 41.

2.2.2 Common grace and sphere sovereignty

Underlying the theory of sphere sovereignty and the multiformity of human life which leads to the realization of cultural flourishing, is Kuyper's understanding of the Reformed concept of common grace. In the 1880s, through the Reformed newspaper, *De Heraut*, Kuyper laboured over the development of a doctrine of common grace, producing a three-volume work on the subject: *De Gemeene Gratie*. In his introduction to volume one Kuyper distinguishes between "three touchstones of grace" which arise, he argues, from Calvin's theology and which are enshrined in the Heidelberg Catechism.[177] These three graces are i) *particular grace* which has its roots in the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election; ii) *covenantal grace* which gives theological meaning and ecclesiological context to particular grace and election; iii) *common grace* which stands behind covenantal grace and is shared commonly with humanity.[178] Kuyper uses two different Dutch phrases to refer to "common grace" - *algemeene genade* and *gemeene gratie* - and while both can mean the same thing, the English translation distinguishes between "common" and "general." Whether common or general, Kuyper takes pains to underline the distinctions between this grace and particular and covenantal grace:

> In itself general grace carries no saving seed within itself and is therefore of an *entirely different nature* from particular grace or covenant grace. Since this is so often lost from view when speaking about general grace, to prevent misunderstanding and confusion it seemed more judicious to revive in our title the otherwise somewhat antiquated expression, and to render the phrase *communis gratia*, used formerly by Latin-speaking theologians, as *common grace*.[179]

In considering the implications for a neo-Calvinist cultural engagement, this distinction is vital because it preserves the movement's Reformed orthodoxy instead of allowing the boundaries between these graces to be collapsed in order to accommodate other views of humanity.

[177] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 5.
[178] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 4.
[179] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 6.

2.3 Kuyper's Christological Common Grace

Kuyper's doctrine of common grace was integral to his cultural theology; he believed this "creative idea" was crucial in understanding how to relate one's faith to the whole of life, and subsequently in cultural transformation for the sake of Christ.[180] Common grace and sphere sovereignty are both derived from God's sovereignty and the belief that Christ is sovereign over all aspects of life, not merely the life of the church: "The non-Christian world has not been handed over to Satan, nor surrendered to fallen humanity, nor consigned to fate. God's sovereignty is great and all-dominating in the life of that unbaptized world as well."[181] Kuyper's development of the doctrine of common grace is not without contention, and these contentions arise from what Reformed theologians believe Calvin meant by "grace" in his writings. For example, in Jochem Douma's comparison of Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin in the area of common grace, he explains that Calvin uses the word "grace" "in a general sense, consciously and continually."[182] Later, he explains that Kuyper's adaptation from Calvin's view of grace of a doctrine of "common grace" went too far in its expectation of the achievements of grace in unbelievers outside of the influence of "special grace"; in contrast, he argues that Calvin recognised one form of grace that had degrees of operation and effectiveness. This is not, in Douma's analysis, sufficient for a full-blown doctrine of common grace.[183] Nevertheless, Kuyper's distinctions between three different forms of grace (particular, covenantal, and common) seem to suggest those degrees of operation and effectiveness: "So we find three emanations of God's grace: a grace that applies to you *personally*, then a grace that you have in common with *all God's saints* in the covenant, but also thirdly, a

[180] In his preface to *Common Grace* Kuyper laments the neglect of the doctrine of common grace in the Reformed church and explains that when interest reawakened in the roots of Calvinism the question of how this related to the world outside the church became significant. He writes: "An investigation had to be launched regarding what creative idea had originally governed Reformed people in their relationship to the non-Christian world, a study every bit as practical as it was theoretical." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, xxxvii.

[181] Because of this all-encompassing sovereignty, the reach of common grace is also all-encompassing, and prevents Christians from retreating away from the non-Christian world. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, xxxvii-xxxviii.

[182] This includes the phrase "special grace" which Calvin uses deliberately to describe the source of gifts bestowed upon unbelievers. Jochem Douma, *Common Grace*, trans. Albert H. Oosterhoff, 2nd impr. (Ontario: Lucerne CTRS Publications, 2017), 243-244.

[183] This is despite the fact that Calvin does refer to general, peculiar, and special grace at different times. Douma, *Common Grace*, 302.

grace of God that you as a human being have in common *with all people*."[184] He is emphatic that common grace should never be mistaken for particular (special) grace: common grace was not salvific.[185]

2.3.1 Distinct from special grace

In Kuyper's doctrine he views common grace and special grace as distinct from, but in relationship with each other.[186] In his chapter, "Forms of Grace," Kuyper describes the relationship between common grace and particular grace, underlining the priority of particular grace but for the purpose of glorifying Christ, not prioritising the salvation of individuals.[187] In addition, Kuyper draws out the delicate balance between holding the line on the Reformed doctrines of salvation and justification by faith alone, and the danger of perceiving Christ's saving work as pertaining only to the things which explicitly are to do with faith, e.g. church and missions.[188] If everything else that falls outside of these areas has nothing to do with salvation then Kuyper issues a strong warning which is worth quoting in full:

> And with but one small step you arrive imperceptibly at the Anabaptist point of view, which ultimately focused everything holy in the soul, and dug an unbridgeable chasm between this inner, spiritual life of the soul and the life around you. Then science becomes unholy, the development of the arts, commerce, and business becomes unholy that is not directly spiritual and focused on the soul. The result is that you end up living in two spheres of thought. On the one hand the very narrow, reduced line of thought involving your soul's salvation, and on the other hand the broad, spacious, life-encompassing sphere of thought involving the world. Your Christ then belongs

[184] In Kuyper's words, these "are three touchstones of grace." Common grace, or "a *general human grace*" is given to *"all the children of humanity*." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 4-5.

[185] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 6. This is despite the fact that Douma explains that for Kuyper common grace eventually became an independent entity. Douma, *Common Grace*, 302.

[186] For example, Kuyper explains that special (particular) grace "presupposes *common grace*" by virtue of the fact that if God had not restrained the effects of sin after the Fall humanity would have perished and no human being could have been saved. Or at the very least the world would be an inhospitable place for the church to exist. Kuyper*, Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 264-265.

[187] In other words, common grace does not exist solely so that individual human beings may be saved. Kuyper's commitment is to make Christ the centre and aim of all of God's grace, and that is because Christ's work goes beyond the salvation of individual human beings to the redemption and restoration of the whole of creation. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 266-268.

[188] Distinctions are crucial for understanding Kuyper. He is emphatic that balance between two extremes is necessary, and that there is danger in falling into either extreme. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 268-269.

> comfortably in that first, reduced sphere of thinking, but not in the broad one. And then from that antithesis and false proportionality proceed all narrow-mindedness, inner untruthfulness, not to mention pious insincerity and impotence.[189]

Herein lies the justification for viewing the whole of life under the sovereignty of Christ. In Christ both nature and grace are restored and united, leading Kuyper to call "Christ the root of common grace."[190] Common grace leads to living *coram deo* in every sphere of society, and here we see the Christological drive in Kuyper's theology.[191] Christ is both Creator and re-Creator.[192] As an aside, from a Kuyperian perspective it may be rightly said that "culture" is religious in the sense that every sphere of cultural life has something to do with Jesus Christ because of common grace.[193] Kuyper seems to suggest that if creation is to flourish as God intended then all who identify themselves as Christians must reclaim this heritage of common grace for while it is distinct from particular and covenantal grace, the three are inextricably linked: in fact, particular grace presupposes common grace.[194]

2.3.2 Importance of common grace

God only deals with humanity in the context of his creation, which is in keeping with the broader Reformed theology of creation outlined earlier in the chapter. Yet, however important this is for a lively theological cultural engagement, there is more to Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. Richard Mouw, in the introduction to the recently translated Volume 1, addresses a question which is fundamental

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[189] It is a matter of *both* salvation of souls *and* the restoration of the whole of life. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1*, 269.

[190] Christ achieved this restoration and unity through his involvement in creation as the eternal Word. Bacote, *The Spirit*, 97-98. There is not scope in this thesis to adequately address Kuyper's Christology, but one aspect is worth noting. Although Kuyper distinguished between Christ as mediator of creation and mediator of salvation this must be understood in relation to the whole of God's works. This concern raised by Cornelis van der Kooi and referred to by Bacote points to the importance of maintaining the unity of "the eternal Son and the incarnate Son" in understanding human cultural development. Bacote, *The Spirit*, 110.

[191] This is why Christ must be the priority when talking of all forms of grace. Kuyper writes: "This is why Scripture continually points out to us that the Savior of the world is also the Creator of the world – indeed, that the reason he could become its Savior is only *because* he was its Creator." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1*, 271.

[192] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1*, 271. Kuyper distinguishes between Christ as the second person of the Trinity in his creating role, and Christ the incarnate Son of Man in his re-creating role.

[193] This is different to Strange's reference to Christ in terms of cultural engagement. The point of engagement for Strange is to bring honour to Christ through exposing the idolatry at the heart of "culture." See e.g., Strange, *Plugged In*, 37.

[194] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 265.

to the neo-Calvinist cultural project, and to this thesis: “What is the real *point* of this engagement? If Kuyper is right that God wants us to take all of this seriously, why is this so important to God?”[195] He continues by explaining through common grace God not only preserves the cultural make-up of creation, but he also *prepares* for the age to come.[196]

2.3.3 Common grace and cultural development

Following the biblical theology that he establishes throughout *Die Gemeene Gratie* Kuyper explains from the book of Revelation that the honourable and glorious cultural developments of the nations will be carried into the new creation; this he calls “the human development as fruit of common grace in the life of the nations.”[197] Mouw affirms this in his introduction when he says that “all that has been accomplished in human history in promoting truth, beauty, goodness, justice, stewardship, even that which has flourished in contexts where the name of Jesus has not been lifted up - all of this will be revealed in the end time as counting toward the coming of his kingdom.”[198] In Kuyper’s theology, this *a priori* of common grace runs like a gold thread throughout history, bearing witness through the cultural development and flourishing of every sphere in society, restraining God’s wrath and creation’s decay as evil also continues to flourish, and preparing human cultural development for a greater end, that of Christ’s rule. For this reason, the golden thread of common grace themes and challenges will also run through this thesis as I consider Kuyper’s contribution to theological cultural engagement in dialogue with cultural anthropology.

2.4 The Antithesis, the Church as Institute and Organism, and the Four Terrains

For a thesis that seeks to establish points of connection between the Reformed tradition and cultural anthropology, Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace, and its application in the principle of sphere sovereignty, is important because it leads

[195] Richard Mouw, “Volume Introduction,” in Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gifts For A Fallen World, Vol. 1, The Historical Section*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, in *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works of Public Theology*, *Series 2*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Iowa: Acton Institute; Lexham Press, 2016), xxvi.

[196] Mouw, “Introduction,” xxvii.

[197] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1*, 552.

[198] Mouw, “Introduction,” xxvii.

Reformed theology out of the institutional church into the public domain. Kuyperian scholar James Bratt writes, “Common grace was thus a theology of public responsibility, of Christians’ shared humanity with the rest of the world.”[199] In other words, Kuyper developed his doctrine of common grace not for the ivory tower of theological philosophy and debate but to support his political ideals for the common good and flourishing of society.

2.4.1 The church in two dimensions

Kuyper saw the church in two dimensions: the first as guardians of the sacraments and biblical tradition of the prophets and apostles in its institutional form,[200] and the second in its organic form as the leaven in society, with individual Christians spreading the light of particular or “special” grace in the various spheres of society in which they operate.[201] This distinction flows from common grace and sphere sovereignty, and is related to other Reformed concepts which Kuyper drew on and developed. These concepts are the antithesis between God and humanity, the distinction and relationship between special and common grace and the subsequent distinction between the church as an institute and the church as an organism, and the outworking of these ideas in society. Kuyper posited four terrains or realms of civilisation on a spectrum of the influence (or not) of common and special grace. These neo-Calvinist concepts are complex and require some individual explanation but each of these interrelated ideas connect vitally to the dialogue with cultural anthropology.

2.4.2 Special grace and the antithesis

In his sermon entitled “Rooted and Grounded,” Kuyper refers to the antithetical relationship that now exists between creation and God after the entrance of sin into the world: “Had sin not come, Eden would have been cultivated, creation

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[199] Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 165.

[200] Kuyper viewed this institution not just in human terms, although it operates through human organisation, but as being God’s institution. Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 14-15.

[201] Kuyper draws on his Calvinist roots as he explains that the church is an organism which exists apart from the institutional expression of it, with its seed springing from God’s loving election of believers in Christ. The eternal soil which gives life to this seed is different to anything found in the world, therefore this “organism is the heart of the church.” Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 11. However, he does add the caveat that following Pentecost, and God’s institution of the organised church (see previous footnote) that “there is mutual interpenetration, a reciprocal influence. *From* the organism the institution is born, but also *through* the institution the organism is fed.” Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 15.

would gradually have been perfected, until finally it would have joined together with the life and transitioned into eternal glory. But now that is no longer the case. The vital root has been severed, the foundation wrested from its moorings."[202] This broken relationship between creation and God's eternal purposes is known as the "antithesis" but is not to be confused with the Hegelian understanding of the term.[203] Instead, the antithesis is deeply embedded in the Calvinist ideas of original sin and natural corruption whereby there is nothing of salvific value in the body, the soul, and the will of man apart from God, which desperate situation requires God's grace for eternal election, atonement, salvation and regeneration; which Kuyper refers to as "special grace."[204] It is only through the exertion of God's special grace that the antithetical relationship between creation and God may be overturned.

2.4.3 Distinctions: grace and grace

Kuyper is interested in keeping a distinction between two graces: "special" and "common." It is vital to understand that Kuyper is not setting up one grace against another; neither is he separating them into two parallel realms where there is no interconnectedness or movement between them.[205] Rather, Kuyper describes common grace as emanating from special grace "and that all its fruit flows into special grace – provided it is understood that special grace is by no means

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[202] Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 9.

[203] The theological definition of the antithesis stands alone without reference to thesis or synthesis, and one of the best definitions is supplied by the later Reformed scholar Henry Stob: "The antithesis is rightly described as taking place between God and Satan, between Christ and antichrist, between angelic and demonic forces, or more abstractly between grace and sin. But however well Christians know that centrally it is the force of God's invincible grace that overcomes the world, and however much they appreciate the involvement of the heavenly hosts in the fight against depravity and sin, they are aware that they themselves must function as active and responsible participants in the ongoing struggle between good and evil. And they know that they must conduct the battle not only within themselves, where both the new and the old man have their seat, but also in the social arena where men and women of flesh and blood present themselves as adversaries of the gospel." Henry Stob, "Observations on the Concept of the Antithesis," in *Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity*, ed. Peter DeCkerk and Richard DeRidder (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), 245.

[204] Calvin uses the word, "antithesis," in describing how the Spirit and the flesh are set against each other: "But we have nothing of the Spirit except through regeneration." Calvin, *Institutes*, 178.

[205] This is contra VanDrunen who argues that Kuyper was affirming a "Two Kingdoms Model" in his leaning towards a separation of church and state, where the civil realm is governed by common grace and the spiritual realm is governed by special grace. However, this is a misunderstanding of Kuyper's compulsion for the church to be effective in society through its members. David VanDrunen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no.4 (2007): 301.

exhausted in the salvation of the elect, but has its ultimate end only in the Son's glorification of the Father's love, and so in the aggrandizement of the perfections of our God."[206] Kuyper's *a priori* was the glory of God and the holding together of all things in creation in Christ, including nature and grace.[207] This motivation was at the heart of his inaugural speech at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam which Kuyper had founded, and came through in one of his most famous quotes: "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, "Mine!"."[208] Because of this unity in Christ the relationship between common and special grace is one of distinction rather than separation, and this distinction provides the foundation for Kuyper's other distinction: the church as institute and the church as organism.

2.4.4 Distinctions: church and church

Embedded in the historical context of his time, Kuyper as statesman, theologian, and minister, recognised the confusion facing the Reformed church in the Netherlands as centring on the relationship between Christianity and "culture."[209] Kuyper sought a distinction which provided a rationale for the freedom of the church in its institutional sphere and at the same time demonstrated the difference in society that the church could make outside of that sphere through the organic life of the church in individual believers. Such a distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism answered this confusion and provided impetus for the fruits of both common grace and special grace to flow from one to the other.[210] In practice this places a responsibility upon the church

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[206] Kuyper, "Common Grace," 170-171.

[207] Rather than there be a separation between nature and grace Kuyper saw both as being in relationship with each other in Christ. Christ is both Creator of nature in common grace and the Redeemer of nature in special grace. The two are inseparable. See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 171.

[208] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488. The Free University (Vrije Universiteit) of Amsterdam was the first confessional Christian higher education institution in the Netherlands operating in society as an equal partner alongside other universities, but specifically for Reformed Christians.

[209] Kuyper writes: "*Over here* people want the church to flow out into society, while *over there* they want the church revamped in line with Rome and *over yonder* they want to make the church expand into the free church of our time." The ecclesiastical issues confronting the Dutch Reformed church in 1870 were perceived by Kuyper to be cultural, social, and political, as well as theological. Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 2-3.

[210] This distinction gave rise to the title of Kuyper's sermon, "Rooted and Grounded," which is taken from the biblical text of Ephesians 3:17, because it encapsulated the unity

as institute to nurture and equip believers through the sacraments and through teaching in order to influence society effectively.[211] It is a "base of operations"[212] for believers into which "the Church must withdraw again within its spiritual domain, and that in the world we should realize the potencies of God's common grace."[213] Here again is the interconnectedness between special and common grace that underpins the distinction and relationship between the church as an institute and the church as an organism.

2.4.5 Distinctions: Kuyper's four terrains

Kuyper expands this distinction even further with the idea of four terrains of culture and society in which common and special grace operate in varying degrees. Rather than describing a whole society as "Christian," there are elements within a society which demonstrate an influence of special grace played out on the stage of common grace.[214] With that in mind, the following "terrains" do not in themselves constitute a non-Christian or Christian society; they are distinctions based on the degree of manifestation of the influence of the Christian faith. Firstly, there is the terrain where there is abundant evidence of common grace, but little change brought about by the influence of special grace.[215] The second terrain belongs to the institutional church and is solely the dominion of special grace.[216] Kuyper's third terrain describes a society of common grace that

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between the church as organism and institution. Kuyper writes: "By means of the person who sows and plants, the metaphor of vital growth overflows into that of the institution; by means of the living stone, the metaphor of the building flows over into that of the organism." Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 5.

[211] The church is to be "a city set on a hill, its light must extend over a wide area. To put it in plain prose, a sanctifying and purifying influence must proceed from the church of the Lord to impact the whole society amid which it operates." Kuyper, "Common Grace," 195.

[212] Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries," 397.

[213] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 31.

[214] Kuyper writes that attaching the label of "Christian" to something in society "only witnesses to the fact that public opinion, the general mind-set, the ruling idea, the political norms, the laws and customs there clearly betoken the influence of the Christian faith. Though this is attributable to special grace, it is manifested on the terrain of common grace, i.e., in ordinary civil life." Kuyper goes on to explain how this is manifested in such developments as the abolition of slavery, the rise of the position of women, provision for the poor and so on. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 199.

[215] Kuyper describes "the terrain of common grace that has not yet undergone any influence of special grace" for which he posits the nation of China, and his own country's development of the sporting world as examples. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 199.

[216] This is "the church endowed with offices" that operates freely within its own sphere: "instituted churches that avoid all usurpation and limit themselves to fulfilling their own task." Kuyper, "Common Grace," 199-200.

boasts of being “Christian.” Despite the obvious cultural influence of special grace upon such a society, “faith and conversion” are lacking.[217]

2.4.6 Society without coercion

Finally, the fourth terrain marks the end point of Kuyper’s trajectory: “the terrain of special grace that has utilized the data of common grace.”[218] What this means is a society where the church as an organism has spread its influence through the establishment of confessional Christian groups and cultural expressions and in so doing has allowed “the life of common grace to be controlled by the principles of divine revelation;” where the label, “Christian,” has come to mean something far more specific and acts as the leaven in society.[219] Nowhere did this manifest itself more plainly than in Kuyper’s politics, for he saw the natural outcome of the fourth terrain as being a society free from coercion and discrimination. This would be a society where freedom of conscience is allowed to flourish and where there are equal rights for all citizens.[220] This terrain provides room for Christian activity to take place without prejudice or discrimination in other spheres of society (education, politics, art, etc.) and not merely within the limited sphere of the institutional church.[221]

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[217] This is perhaps the most confusing of the four terrains because Kuyper later explains that this refers to “the life of non-confessors in a Christian country” and that Scripture shows this to be the “part of the world that is illumined by the light of believers.” From these later descriptions he is clearly referring to societies which claim to be “Christian” and certainly have some manifestations of special grace in society, but the members of those societies are neither confessing nor practising Christians. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 200.

[218] Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 199.

[219] Here is Kuyper’s justification for his Christian politics, a Christian university, Christian schools, Christian music and so on; not as a way in which to retreat from society but to operate within it on its own terms – the terms of common grace, but in a confessional manner. Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 200.

[220] Kuyper’s commitment to liberty of conscience and a free society is all-pervasive. For example, in *Our Program*, which sets out the foundations for the Anti-Revolutionary Party, he argues that no citizen “should be excluded from appointment to a certain post merely on the basis of what he believes or does not believe.” Kuyper, *Our Program,* 69.

[221] Kuyper makes the following impassioned plea: “In the civil state, all citizens of the Netherlands must have equal rights before the law. The time *must* come when it will be considered inconceivable, even ridiculous, to discriminate or offend anyone, whoever it may be, for his convictions as a Seceder or Doleant, as a Catholic or Jew.” Kuyper, “Maranatha,” 221. Kuyper’s political aims in 1891, when he addressed his Antirevolutionary party in Utrecht, were fourfold: religion honoured, the restoration of freedom of conscience, a restoration of organic relations in society where policies are campaigned for on the basis of relationships between different sectors of society rather than on individualism, and a spirit of compassion. He believed his confessional Christian party could achieve this, and if so, the fourth terrain would be in motion. Kuyper, “Maranatha,” 225.

2.4.7 Distinctions and criticism

Kuyper explains that these terrains, and their founding distinctions, are often confused particularly by those who minister in the institutional church; however, he defends these distinctions by referring to special grace as a city on the hill which is neither mingled with nor opposes common grace in the world below.[222] Infused through these terrains are his distinctions between common and special grace, the church as institute and organism, and his presuppositions of sphere sovereignty and the antithesis.[223] Furthermore, conceiving these four terrains and their positions in terms of common and special grace demonstrates Kuyper's commitment to a Christianity which is able to effect society for the common good and the glory of Christ.

As mentioned above, Kuyper's views on sphere sovereignty, multiformity, and particularly common grace are not without their critics. There remain those within the Reformed tradition who are suspicious of Kuyper's over-emphasis upon common grace, and view this as a dangerous slip towards conformity with any current cultural tide and especially with a pluralism that may undermine monotheism.[224] Daniel Strange, whose work on theological cultural engagement I critiqued in the thesis introduction, suggests that Kuyper's development of Calvinist orthodoxy in his theory of sphere sovereignty and the doctrine of common grace "would critique him as illegitimately 'speculative' and lacking Scriptural warrant."[225] However Kuyper himself lays the groundwork for the application of his thought in the content of the Stone Lectures presented at Princeton University in 1898. Entitled "Lectures in Calvinism," Kuyper presented an analysis, defence, and application of Calvinism to all spheres of life and in so

[222] Kuyper, "Common Grace," 200.

[223] Kuyper continues to use phrases such as "distinct and separate" as he describes the terrains and the difference between believers operating in the city of light and unbelievers receiving that light in the world of darkness. He does not abandon the antithesis in his theology but expands it through relating it to common grace and special grace. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 200-201.

[224] For example, in his preface to Kuyper's "Common Grace," editor James Bratt comments that Kuyper's contemporary critics held concerns over common grace because it promoted worldliness, and a dangerous compromise for Reformed Christians. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 166.

[225] Daniel Strange, "Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Church as Institute and Church as Organism, and Its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 432, http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/themelios/Themelios40.3.pdf#page=49.

doing, goes some way in justifying the application of sphere sovereignty in society.

2.5 Kuyper's Stone Lectures: A Manifesto for Applied Calvinism

In 1898 Kuyper gave the Stone lectures at Princeton University, in which he presented Calvinism as a life-system which encompassed the whole of reality, not merely the Reformed theological tradition contained within the walls of the institutional church. Through these lectures the themes of neo-Calvinism appear clearly: common grace, sphere sovereignty, the antithesis, the church as institute and organism, and the four terrains, as well as liberty of conscience. Over all these, and encompassing the Calvinist life-system as a whole was Kuyper's *a priori*: that Christ is sovereign over all of creation.[226] In this section I will consider this life-system as expounded in the Stone Lectures, along with the fundamentals of Calvinism for the contemporary age, in order to demonstrate why Kuyper's theology provides the best foundation for a theological cultural engagement that engages both cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism.

2.5.1 Calvinism: the highest form of human life

In the Stone Lectures Kuyper argues that Calvinism as a life-system is the highest form of human life; that as a movement it exists for the purpose of total cultural transformation. For Kuyper, Calvinism was "one of the principle phases in the general development of our human race ...whose high calling still is to influence the further course of human life."[227] He sees the Reformation as a milestone in human development and the theological principles which emerged from the Reformation as providing the foundation for all of life. Multiformity is key here, as Kuyper demonstrates that liberty of conscience, and the equality of all men before God which leads to complex human cultural interactions, finds their home most supremely in Calvinism. As Kuyper addresses man's relationship to God, man's relationship to man, and man's relationship to the world, he explains how these interactions involve both salvation, or particular grace, and common grace in all spheres of human life.[228] Kuyper's argument is that Calvinism, and crucially *his* understanding of Calvinism, is a life-system that

[226] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488.
[227] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 22.
[228] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 11.

"meets every required condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage."[229]

2.5.2 Calvinism: source of human liberty

In these lectures Kuyper presents Calvinism as a life-system which praises and upholds "endless multiformity," "difference," and "distinctions," and provides a lens through which to view and engage with the entire scope of human life.[230] As outlined above, cultural heterogeneity under God's sovereignty is integral to Kuyper's theory of sphere sovereignty, which he vigorously defends in his lecture on Calvinism and Politics.[231] Sphere sovereignty in the context of this lecture series also includes what Kuyper terms the "sovereign conscience" which explains the difference between the concept of human freedom upheld in the French Revolution, for example, and the idea of human liberty in Calvinism. This was "a liberty of conscience, which enables every man to serve God according to his own conviction and the dictates of his own heart."[232] True freedom, then, was to be found not in an imposed civil liberty but in the concept of sphere sovereignty which has its roots in Calvinism as a life-system.

2.5.3 Calvinism: context for common grace and antithesis

Common grace appears in Kuyper's lectures as being integral to the project of human development reaching its fullest potential. One of the reasons for the establishment of Reformed doctrine as distinct from other church groups was, according to Kuyper, "that the church should withdraw again into its spiritual domain [as opposed to assuming political power], and that in the world we should realize the potencies of God's common grace."[233] In this view common grace requires Christians to be actively pursuing cultural activity and development for the common good and the glory of Christ. Common grace carries with it an obligation that goes beyond the individual's personal holiness.

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[229] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 25.

[230] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16.

[231] For example, Kuyper writes: "Neither the life of science nor of art, nor of agriculture, nor of industry, nor of commerce, nor of navigation, nor of the family, nor of human relationship may be coerced to suit itself to the grace of the government." The reason for this was because God has ordained that these various spheres be autonomous and sovereign in their own right, thus preserving heterogeneity. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 71.

[232] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 80-81.

[233] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 20.

However, common grace also makes it possible for evil to flourish and Kuyper also refers to a further concept in these lectures: that of the antithesis. In fact, he had already spoken on the concept of the antithesis in 1892 at the Free University in a speech entitled, “The Blurring of the Boundaries.” In this speech he traced the entire history of 19th century European philosophy into its contemporary evolution into pantheism and modernity. Kuyper argued that the Christ of the Scriptures is the final answer to the unending Hegelian progression of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. He is the final word; in fact, he embodies the antithesis, as do all his followers. With reference to pantheism versus Christianity he writes:

> So powerful a *life*-movement can be successfully countered only by the movement of an antithetical *life*. Over against those who blur the boundaries in life and in consciousness you yourself must posit a life with sharply defined characteristics. Over against the slithering fluidities of pantheism, the clear statement of a sincerely held confession. Over against the elevation of the word of the world, the absolute authority of Scripture.

2.5.4 Calvinism: ongoing renewal

In the Stone lectures Kuyper suggests that Calvinism will once again experience renewal in future generations in a similar way to its renewal under Kuyper. This renewal will bear the same hallmarks of the antithetical life: “Superficiality will not brace us for the conflict. Principle must again bear witness against principle, world-view against world-view, spirit against spirit.”[234] Kuyper’s confidence lies in this Calvinism being the life-system through which all human life can develop to its fullest, both in his own time and in a future age; a life-system rooted in the sovereignty of God who is bringing history to its fulfilment.[235] As part of this progression of history Kuyper also predicted first a wane and then a renewal of Calvinism for a new generation who would once again apply Reformed doctrine, as he had done, to their contemporary age.[236]

[234] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 152.
[235] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 85.
[236] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

2.6 From Distinction to Separation

In upholding and emphasising any distinctions there is a risk that those distinctions stretch to become separations. Instead of upholding civil liberty for all citizens of society through the equality of distinct spheres, separations between spheres can occur leading to superiority, coercion and injustice. Once these separations become institutionalised in the church, and enshrined in law, then what follows will include discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, social and economic backgrounds, racial segregation, and ultimately a system of apartheid. This pathogenic seed of separation in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty was aided, but not excused, by a deep rootedness in the historical and cultural context of his time. Chapter Four will provide anthropological lenses through which to view the significance of recognising cultural influences when undertaking any kind of cultural engagement; it is with that foresight that I now consider the cultural and historical accoutrements of Kuyper's thought alongside the dangerous propensity for xenophobic separation bound up in sphere sovereignty.

2.6.1 Kuyper's nationalist spirit: South Africa

In January 1900 Kuyper published an article entitled, "De Crisis in Zuid-Afrika," which attacked the imperialism and war atrocities of the English during the Boer Wars. Caught up in his zealous haranguing concerning the treatment of the Dutch Boers at the hands of English colonists was his criticism of the abolition of slavery across South Africa.[237] Two convictions emerge through this criticism: the first is that the black South Africans were an inferior race to the Boers and therefore slavery was kinder than the "lawlessness" that ensued post-abolition.[238] Secondly, that it was Calvinism which justified both his nationalism and his attitude towards the native South Africans, over-against the Methodism

[237] Kuyper's issue is the lack of compensation promised by the British government to Boer slaveowners, and with the subsequent bullying of the Boers by their former slaves. Abraham Kuyper, "The South African Crisis (1900)," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 334-335.

[238] Kuyper describes the Boers as being unsentimental when it comes to natives, unlike the English: "They understood that the Hottentots and the Bantus were an inferior race and that to put them on an equal footing with whites, in their families, in society, and in politics, would be simple folly. Kuyper, "The South African Crisis," 339.

of the missionaries and the Anglicanism of the Clapham Sect.[239] Most of Kuyper's anger in this article is directed towards the English (government in particular, but the race in general), but his reference to "Hottentots," his support of slavery, his abhorrence of interracial relationships, and his belief in the right of the Boer's to populate and rule over the "negroes" point to an unmistakable core belief in racial supremacy of the white Dutch over the black South Africans.[240]

Implied within this strongly nationalistic spirit is a trajectory of apartheid, and the South African minister and theologian H. Russel Botman affirms that Kuyper is rightly indicted in the theological underpinnings of apartheid in South Africa.[241] He writes: "Difference was and, unfortunately, still is seen as the historical problem, separateness as the guiding value orientation, and apartheid and segregated churches as the justifiable structural solutions."[242] Although Kuyper was a man of his time, stirred up into anti-English sentiment by a bloody war which oppressed his fellow Dutch, his views and influences have been devastatingly far-reaching.

2.6.2 Kuyper's racial hierarchy: Darwinian or Calvinist?

Some of his critics believe that Kuyper was detrimentally influenced by German Romanticism as well as a type of Darwinian evolutionary theory which accepted without question that Europe consisted of the highest evolved and sophisticated societies. For example, African-American Professor of Social Ethics at Princeton, Peter Paris, comments that the hierarchical system of race and civilisation can be traced back to European Romanticism; theologically it comes

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[239] This is an implication drawn from Kuyper's effusing over the Boer's Calvinism, and his harsh criticism of the Clapham Sect's campaign for the abolition of slavery, and the Methodist missions which favoured the cause of the natives over that of the Boers. See e.g., Kuyper, "The South African Crisis," 331, 334-335, and 337.

[240] For example, Kuyper praises the Boers for avoiding "mixed *liaisons*" between Boers and natives, even going so far as to treat any sexual relationship as incest. Even in the area of Christian faith and evangelization, separate congregations appear to be the norm, perhaps to protect the Boers from being tempted. Kuyper, "The South African Crisis," 339.

[241] South African Kuyper scholar Craig Bartholomew describes how momentous it was when he realised what holding a Christian worldview meant in his context. He describes his belief "that the gospel can and should be brought to bear critically on all aspects of life, including the racism of apartheid in South Africa." Bartholomew, *Contours*, 102.

[242] H. Russel Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice, 351. Botman's comments on the Kuyperian legacy in apartheid will be explored in more detail later in this thesis. Here his point rests on his argument that "separateness" was a core value for Kuyper and underpinned his Calvinist interpretation and practice.

from a combination of the belief in the biblical curse upon Noah's son, Ham, and a "social Darwinism."[243] Certainly, as mentioned above, in Kuyper's Stone Lectures he places Calvinism within an evolutionary framework as providing the basis for the highest and noblest kind of society. Daniel Strange suggests that Kuyper's distinction between the church as organism and the church as institute was influenced by Romantic philosophy.[244] As Strange comments, despite Kuyper's continual warring against the spirit of the age throughout his writing, it seems to have pervaded his presuppositions in a manner to which he was blinded. This hypocrisy shows itself not only in his overplay of the organic church, but in his belief in equality and liberty. At the time, Kuyper's social justice did not appear to stretch beyond his fellow white, Dutch countrymen and was confined to the civilisation which had self-consciously built itself upon what he perceived to be the noblest bedrock of all: Calvinism.

2.6.3 Post-apartheid Kuyperianism

Whatever the complex reasons for Kuyper's attitudes towards other races and his internalised guiding principle of "separateness" the consequences of his influence on race relations and particularly upon theological justification for apartheid in South Africa cannot be ignored. They call into question the validity of using sphere sovereignty in theological cultural engagement and challenge any application of Kuyper's principles to consider the far-reaching implications. Botman marks the complexity of the influence of Kuyperianism on apartheid, an influence that continues to be debated.[245] Nevertheless, Botman explains that Kuyper has also been influential on liberative movements, demonstrating that South Africa is not finished yet with Kuyperianism. For example, it is Kuyper's commitment to social justice that is reflected in the formulation of the

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[243] Peter J. Paris, "The African and African-American Understanding of Our Common Humanity: A Critique of Abraham Kuyper's Anthropology," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan. Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2000), 268. Paris explains that Christians believed that being black was a sign of the curse of Ham.

[244] Strange references Calvinist scholar Henry Zwaanstra in his critique of Kuyper's ecclesiology, drawing attention to Kuyper's over-emphasis on abstract organicist ideas at the expense of the biblical descriptions of church. Strange, "Rooted and Grounded," 441.

[245] Botman makes the point that the theology that supported apartheid in South Africa was "eclectic" and "relied on Ficthtean Romaniticism for defining the authority of experience in theology and on an Anglo-Saxon and German Lutheran missiology to structure the system of separation." Kuyper's contribution was to provide a theology of "separateness". Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 348.

Confession of Belhar, which manifestly rejects all notion of separation between people on theological grounds.[246] The Confession of Belhar, along with other Reformed confessions, forms the confessional foundation for the Uniting Reformed Church, and contains within it clear statements of belief about social justice; for example:[247]

> That the church belonging to God, should stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who seek selfishly their own interests and thus control and harm others. Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.[248]

According to Botman, it is Kuyper's commitment to social justice that serves as the foundation for Belhar.[249] Botman does not appear to juxtapose "the Kuyper of social justice" with the "Kuyper of sphere sovereignty" but rather, his contrast highlights how the principles of sphere sovereignty were appropriated as a theological justification for the "separateness" already inherent in the Dutch Reformed Church.

2.6.4 Wholeness and the sovereign rule of Christ

Kuyper's belief in the sovereign rule of Christ over every square inch of life was central to his Reformed consciousness. Writing in 1984, South African Reformed scholar Allan Boesak affirmed this belief as being a vital doctrine for the church in its response to apartheid and a justification for the *black* Reformed

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[246] The Confession of Belhar was formulated in 1982 by the World Council of Churches and adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 345-346. With its acute emphasis on unity, the confession rejects "any doctrine which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation." Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa, "Confession of Belhar," accessed July 22, 2019, http://cape.urcsa.net/confession-of-belhar/. This is the 2008 revised, English version.

[247] The Uniting Reformed Church was formed from the dissolution of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in 1994. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 346.

[248] "Confession of Belhar."

[249] Botman also references supporters of Barth's theological emphasis on the visible unity of the church. The Confession of Belhar unites both Kuyperians and Barthians in a primary belief in "a God of justice." Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 347.

churches in South Africa to be involved in politics.[250] In addition, this belief forms the theological justification for the pursuit of wholeness of life in which there is no space for considering Africans to be less than fully human.[251] Wholeness of life is inherent in the Reformed tradition because of the commitment to Christ's cosmic lordship, and for Boesak it was the theological justification for "conscientious disobedience" and an end to apartheid.[252] These positive examples are helpful for the purposes of this thesis in ensuring that any discussion and re-application of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty must be fully tempered by a pursuit of social justice. In this regard, Kuyper must re-Kuyper himself.

2.6.5 Race-consciousness in North America

The problem of setting one Kuyper against another is highlighted in the following example. In 2015 the non-partisan think tank, Cardus, published a review of a recent Princeton conference on "Faith and Race," commenting that Kuyperianism results in "a bifurcation of our social lives into different spheres and sequestered conversations where some groups attend to "race issues" while others focus on theology and economics without attention to this racialized legacy."[253] Instead what is called for is an embedding of race-consciousness into neo-Calvinism. In the Cardus review Vincent Bacote suggests that evidence of race-consciousness in North American neo-Calvinism could make a significant impact on American society, as theologians begin to re-imagine Kuyperianism for a contemporary context.[254] The negative impact of the influence of Kuyper's theology on race-relations that has led to the very opposite of social justice, equality, and liberty of conscience, not to mention the idea of unity of an organic whole at the heart of sphere sovereignty, cannot be

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[250] Boesak's argument was that it suited the government to have white Reformed Christians in politics who theologically upheld the system of apartheid but not black Reformed Christians who opposed it. Through reclaiming his Reformed heritage, Boesak was advocating civil disobedience with Scriptural and theological justification. Allan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (New York: Orbis, 1984), 34-35.

[251] Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 45.

[252] Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 49.

[253] Jeff Liou and David Robinson, "Our Racist Inheritance: a conversation Kuyperians need to have," Cardus, published May 14, 2015, https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/our-racist-inheritance-a-conversation-kuyperians-need-to-have/.

[254] In "Our Racist Inheritance" Bacote is reported to have said the following: "This consciousness enables Kuyperians to speak a *better* word of justice than all the grand juries or states' attorneys ever could. Such stories would allow them to boldly proclaim that shalom can even break into the all too ordinary racial pain of our national life."

taken lightly. Therefore any pursuit of the renewal of Christian cultural engagement must be heavily influenced by Kuyper's commitment to social justice, in order that all who undertake such engagement heed the words of the Confession of Belhar to "stand where the Lord stands, against injustice and with the wronged."[255]

2.6.6 Kuyper's anti-feminism: maintaining distinctions between the sexes

It is not surprising that Kuyper's distinctions reach to the area of gender roles, given his historical and theological context. His fear was the collapsing of distinctions between men and women, a fear which leads him to make some stark comments about the physical appearances of both.[256] These distinctions stem from the different spheres which men and women inhabit, and that these spheres had been allotted by God.[257] His belief was that feminists – particularly suffragettes – wanted to be men, and in their feminism had ceased to be women.[258] Kuyper's view of women's suffrage was misguided at the time; suffragettes had no interest in becoming less than women but they certainly challenged any notion of being limited to particular life-spheres. Kuyper's comments about the home and the submission of wives to their husbands, and his opinions about the physical characteristics of men and women, are a challenge to our contemporary cultural context. Paradoxically, Kuyper's commitment to equality also influenced his writing about women, and he advocated for social justice between men and women.[259] Nevertheless his

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[255] "Confession of Belhar."

[256] Kuyper, in writing about feminism, baulks at any manner in which men display female physical traits and vice versa (long hair, chest size, voice pitch for example): "in times of decline, moral corruption, and national degeneration, we find much higher numbers of these impure and mixed types." Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege: Living Under Christ's Kingship*, *Vol. 2*, *The Kingship of Christ In Its Operation*, ed. John Kok and Nelson D. Kloosterman, trans. Albert Grootjes, in *Abraham Kuyper Collected Works of Public Theology*, *Series 3*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Melvin Flikkema (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2017), chap.7, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=hZZBDgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=kuyper+pro+rege+vol+2&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwim5tKA6rTiAhXZ8OAKHecxA6sQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=moral%20corruption&f=false.

[257] Men's sphere is primarily outside the home, and women's sphere is primarily within the home. In these spheres both excel. Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, *Vol. 2*, chap. 7.

[258] Kuyper states that feminists will never become men, but they may become caricatures of men. *Kuyper Pro Rege, Vol. 2,* chap. 7.

[259] Calvinist scholar Mary Steward Van Leeuwen described Kuyper as both "a social feminist" and "a gender hierarchicalist" stating that he "was a firm supporter of what he called social feminism" but argued very specifically "for women's seclusion from public life" on the grounds that men and women had been gifted by God in very different ways for very different functions. See e.g. Mary Steward Van Leeuwen, "The Carrot and the Stick: Kuyper on Gender, Family and Class," in *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the*

primary concern was to preserve distinctions so that this area of life under God would not collapse into sameness, and this concern was certainly tied to his historical context in terms of attitude and education.[260]

However, it is not enough to relegate Kuyper's attitudes to gender roles and to race to his historical context.[261] It serves an injustice to the millions of black South Africans who suffered and continue to suffer in the aftermath of apartheid. His views on the women's suffrage movement and feminism cannot be left to stand without criticism. Especially for a dialogue with cultural anthropology, Kuyper's racism should not be dismissed or minimized. If theological cultural engagement is to have any value whatsoever, it must come from a place of recognizing and repenting of past attitudes and allowing them to be shaped by principles that Kuyper held dear: freedom of conscience, justice, and equality.[262]

2.7 Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*: Further Neo-Calvinist Development

Herman Bavinck was Kuyper's contemporary, born into the Dutch Reformed tradition in 1854. Theologian John Bolt, in his editor's introduction to *Church Dogmatics*, describes Bavinck as "a man between two worlds," in the sense that he felt a conflict between the pull of modernity and his pietistic background.[263] This conflict, similar to Kuyper's own challenges, supplies the foundation for the rigorous re-application of Reformed theology to contemporary culture and society which has become the hallmark of neo-Calvinism.[264] Contemporary

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Twenty-First Century, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdman's, 2000), 65-66, 73.

[260] Van Leeuwen suggests that Kuyper may have believed that his emphasis on sphere sovereignty in terms of gender benefitted women and gave them a dignity and value they had not previously enjoyed. Van Leeuwen, "The Carrot and the Stick," 83.

[261] It is possible that Kuyper may have developed his views which assigned particular races and genders to specific spheres, as Van Leeuwen suggests, but this is now the task of Kuyper's successors. Van Leeuwen, "The Carrot and the Stick," 84.

[262] Van Leeuwen writes that those who develop sphere sovereignty "must take seriously the need for both public and domestic justice." There is a further need, she suggests, in recognising "that the cultural mandate is a human mandate, not be subdivided by ethnicity, class, generation, or gender, but shared in all respects by all who share the image of God." Van Leeuwen, "The Carrot and the Stick," 84.

[263] John Bolt, "Editor's Introduction," in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1, Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 13-14.

[264] Bolt, "Introduction," 15.

Bavinck scholar James Eglinton comments that Bavinck's use of the title *Reformed Dogmatics* was intentional; in doing so he was deliberately resurrecting systematic theology in the Reformed tradition. However, his approach was also intentionally and distinctly neo-Calvinist.[265]

2.7.1 Bavinck's systematic theology

Bavinck's belief was that the triune God, who was also the Creator, was able to restore man's corrupt nature through grace and that this had implications for the way in which Christians engaged with their cultural surroundings. Therefore, like Kuyper he refused to either flee from the world like the pietists or merge with the world. Both were opposed to "national sociocultural identity" merged with "a theocratic church ideal."[266] Maintaining the balance between both of these approaches to cultural application is what forms the basis for Bavinck's systematic theology.

In Kuyper, Bavinck found answers to the problem of staying faithful to Reformed doctrine while remaining in the world. One of the ways Bavinck demonstrates his orthodoxy is through rooting his theology in Scripture as the revelation of God about himself.[267] This Reformation principle stands in direct opposition to the Enlightenment philosophy posited by Kant, for example, that God cannot be known. Instead Bavinck addresses what Bolt terms "the profound epistemological crisis of post-Enlightenment modernity" through positing a new approach to "Christian discipleship in God's world."[268]

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[265] Eglinton's concern in his thesis concerning Bavinck is the theologian's "organic motif" which in relationship with systematic theology is a hallmark of neo-Calvinism. James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), chap. 1, https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tPxoZezT-cYC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[266] Bolt writes of Bavinck: "His heart and mind sought a trinitarian synthesis of Christianity and culture, a Christian worldview that incorporates what was best in both pietism and modernism, while above all honouring the theological and confessional richness of the Reformed tradition dating from Calvin." Bolt, "Introduction," 17.

[267] Bolt writes: "Dogmatics, according to Bavinck, is the knowledge that God has revealed in his Word to his church concerning himself and all creatures as they stand in relation to him." Bolt, "Introduction," 19.

[268] Bolt, "Introduction," 20-21.

2.7.2 Dogmatics for the glory of God

This new approach, which Bavinck terms “dogmatics” is primarily concerned with God’s glory rather than with man’s salvation.[269] Dogmatics reveals how God through history guides “the whole of creation back to the objective he decreed for it: the glory of his name.”[270] With this goal in mind the Christian has a dual responsibility: to remain a disciple in the world, rather than fleeing from it, and to remain a *distinct* disciple in the world, rather than merging with it. Kuyper explored this through his theory of sphere sovereignty, with the believer operating in all spheres before the face of God. Bavinck developed it further with his construction of a theological defence of cultural engagement in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

2.7.3 Common grace developments

For the purpose of this thesis, which seeks to renew Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition through dialogue with cultural anthropology, Bavinck’s creation theology has great relevance and importance. This is for two reasons: 1) Bavinck’s creation theology places a priority on the idea that grace restores nature; 2) Bavinck’s creation theology emphasises the continuing goodness of creation which is to be both enjoyed and cared for. Firstly, Bavinck explains that the God who is revealed through creation is the same “God of grace” who makes himself known through Scripture: “Hence general and special revelation interact with each other...Nature precedes grace; grace perfects nature. Reason is perfected by faith, faith presupposes nature.”[271] With regard to the second point Bavinck emphasises Calvin’s point that “creation is neither to be deified nor despoiled but as the “theatre of God’s glory” to be delighted in and used in a stewardly manner. It is God’s good creation.”[272] God’s revelation of himself in creation places a great value on that creation and provides a common ground for both believers and unbelievers.[273]

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[269] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1*, 175. Bavinck contrasts Calvinist Reformed theology with Lutheran theology as being the difference between the questions, “How can I be saved?” (Lutheranism) and “How is the glory of God advanced?” (Calvinism).

[270] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1*, 112.

[271] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol.1,* 322.

[272] Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1999), 23.

[273] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1*, 321.

Kuyper's common grace seems to expand and flourish in both of these points and as they stand they demonstrate the relevance of the role of neo-Calvinism in theological cultural engagement.

2.7.4 Creational unity and diversity

However, these two insights from Bavinck's *Dogmatics* can be expanded further. For example, his creation theology presupposes the fact that it is exclusively the Triune God of Christian scripture who reveals himself through his creation, and in doing so supplements the argument for infinite diversity in creation:

> The doctrine of the Trinity provides true light here. Just as God is one in essence and distinct in persons, so also the work of creation is one and undivided, while in its unity it is still rich in diversity. It is one God who creates all things, and for that reason the world is a unity, just as the unity of the world demonstrates the unity of God. But in that one divine being there are three persons, each of whom performs a task of his own in that one work of creation.[274]

Following on from this argument for diversity and unity from the doctrine of the Trinity Bavinck argues that the creator has to be a Triune God because creation presupposes the ability on behalf of the divine creator to reveal himself: "The dogma of the Trinity...tells us that God can reveal himself in an absolute sense to the Son and the Spirit, and hence, in a relative sense also to the world."[275] This is important for two reasons: firstly, it affirms the Reformed orthodoxy of neo-Calvinism, and secondly through Bavinck's systematic theology we see both the relevance and potential of Reformed creationism for a dialogue with cultural anthropology in the renewal of Christian cultural engagement.

2.7.5 Common grace, the goodness of creation, and the glory of God

Bavinck's emphasis on the goodness of creation has a relevance which seems to enlarge the Kuyperian common grace basis for cultural engagement through emphasising the idea of the glory of God. This is demonstrated in Bavinck's thought that all creation, even "from the lowest forms of life" is continually

[274] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1*, 423.
[275] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol.1*, 331.

moving towards “a God-glorifying end.”[276] Referring to Augustine, Bavinck argues that the whole of creation contains “an infinitely varied diversity” which perfectly reflects the glory of God: “For God is the supreme being: supremely true, supremely good, and supremely beautiful. For that reason he created many creatures who in varying degrees partake of his being, truth, goodness, and beauty.”[277] Creation is good, therefore, because it reflects the glory of God. By implication, any engagement with the various developments of creation is intrinsically theological. Connected to this reflection of the glory of God is both the idea of the image of God having been preserved in humanity despite the existence of total depravity, and the idea of God’s providence towards the whole of his creation, not just the regenerate.

2.7.6 Nature and grace

Firstly, in the idea of the image of God in humanity Bavinck argues from the Reformed tradition that human beings do not simply bear the image of God but that they *are* the image of God, and that image is themselves in their whole being.[278] By implication there is at the very least a connection between the cultural works of humankind and the image of God, and in Reformed terms that is intrinsically bound up with the glory of God. Secondly, in the idea of God’s providence, Bavinck writes: “Whatever God may do in nature and grace, it is always he who preserves all things, who empowers them by the influx of his energy, and who governs them by his wisdom and omnipotence.”[279] This description provides an appropriate framework in which to place Kuyperian common grace. For without the providence of God, which Bavinck explains embraces “everything that is treated in dogmatics after the doctrine of creation and includes both the works of nature and of grace,” there would be no justification for a common grace by which all creation is able to flourish.[280]

[276] Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 57.
[277] Bavinck, *In the Beginning,* 57.
[278] Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 181-2, 186-195.
[279] Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 244.
[280] Bavinck, *In the Beginning,* 244.

2.7.7 The Future of Creation and Cultural Engagement

However, there is one further dimension to Bavinck's creation theology which is another development of Kuyperian Calvinism: that is the renewal of creation at the end of the age. Bavinck writes: "Biblical hope, rooted in incarnation and resurrection, is creational, this-worldly, visible, physical, bodily hope. The rebirth of human beings is completed in the glorious rebirth of all creation, the new Jerusalem, whose architect and builder is God himself."[281] Bavinck's belief that Scripture favours creation renewal and rebirth rather than destruction is important because of the implication for all the works of humanity throughout history which pertain to creation.[282] As detailed above, Kuyper held to the same view which bolstered his ideas of common grace and sphere sovereignty and the ultimate end goal towards which God by his providence is moving all of creation. This gives value and meaning to all the cultural works of humanity which are considered good and just, and not only those which are done by the church, for example.

2.7.8 Divine generosity

Bavinck's developed neo-Calvinist theology provides an important grounding for Kuyperian ideas, particularly in the areas of the plurality of spheres and cultural diversity, common grace, and the ultimate eschatological consummation of cultural development. Richard Mouw describes Bavinck's theology as displaying "divine generosity" which he sees as imperative for contemporary cultural engagement.[283] This divine generosity is in keeping with orthodox Calvinist belief, argues Mouw, even when it causes Bavinck to state that there are some situations where we simply cannot know the judgement of God when it comes to unbelievers.[284] Mouw argues that Bavinck's development of Kuyper's neo-Calvinism demonstrates that this theology is relevant for all manner of cultural

[281] Herman Bavinck, *Vol. 4*, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2008), 715.

[282] Bavinck writes: "All that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in the whole of creation, in heaven and on earth, is gathered up in the future city of God – renewed, re-created, boosted to its highest glory." Bavinck, *Dogmatics, Vol. 4*, 720.

[283] Richard J. Mouw, "Neo Calvinism: A Theology for the Global Church in the 21st Century," Herman Bavinck Lecture, Theological University, Kampen, given June 01, 2015, 14. Acquired through personal correspondence with Dr Mouw.

[284] See e.g., Mouw, "Neo-Calvinism," 18.

engagement in the present-day, while being robust enough to remain faithful to the Reformed and Calvinist stable from which it came.

2.7.9 Bavinck's "The Sacrifice of Praise"

1n 1901 Bavinck published a short book for practical use in churches. Its full title was *The Sacrifice of Praise: Meditations before and after receiving access to the table of the Lord*. This short book was intended to teach communicants (in the Dutch Reformed church) on the subject of "confession"; specifically, what communicants are confessing, and what they are doing as they confess during the communion service.[285] Comprising of twelve chapters (eleven originally), Bavinck takes the reader through from "The Basis of Confession" to "The Triumph of Confession." Along the way the reader is asked to consider issues such as "The Obligation to Confession", "The Diversity of Confession", and "The Universality of Confession." Bavinck begins with explaining that the foundation of the confession of Christ is God's "covenant of grace" by which every believer is accepted and adopted by God through Christ.[286] Establishing this foundation at the start of his meditations means that every aspect of the confession starts and ends with this covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is like a marriage ceremony between Christ and the believer, with the confession like a renewal of vows.[287]

This book has merit for this thesis not merely because it is a great work of neo-Calvinist theology, but because it is a practical outworking of the implications of neo-Calvinism: it is a book of formation. For example, Bavinck describes how

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[285] In his introduction to the 1922 translated edition of *The Sacrifice of Praise*, John Bovenkerk, Pastor of the First Reformed Church of Muskegon, voices some of the misunderstandings of church members regarding confession. He writes: "Ministers and elders frequently hear such questions as these: Is it really necessary to make public confession? Why should I take that step? What does it mean to confess Christ? What is the relation between Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Does God demand that one should unite with the Church? What rewards may the sincere confessor expect?" John Bovenkerk, "Editor's Introduction," in Herman Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, trans. Rev. John Dolfin (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Louis Kregel, Publisher, 1922), 11-12.

[286] Bavinck draws a contrast between the covenant given by God prior to the Fall, and this covenant promised via Eve: "But the covenant of grace, which was announced for the first time in the maternal promise, has its basis and security only in the divine counsel of grace." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 15.

[287] Believers enjoy the spiritual blessings that come only through Christ's redeeming work, and which are sealed by Baptism and access to the Lord's table: "They can only be our part and portion then, when we are participants of Christ's person. The mystical union with Christ precedes all merits and benefits and reveals itself first in faith and conversion." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 24.

the Word of God is at work in the life of an infant, and even in the lives of atheists, regardless of whether they have read the Bible or heard it preached.[288] This belief that God's word is present and active at all times and in all places carries with it an implicit echo of what Kuyper might call common grace. Bavinck does not refer to it in those terms because this is not a theological treatise, but a book of formation. However, this implicit belief in a world that operates fully under God's sovereignty, in which God is active in all realms of life, is typically neo-Calvinist. Another example is Bavinck's reference to nature and grace. Kuyper stated that grace restores nature in his work on common grace.[289] In his chapter on "The Diversity of Confession," Bavinck repeats this idea in speaking about the diversity of spiritual gifts in the church.[290] Here is another implicit Kuyperian theological conviction being used in the formation of the believer through confession: a commitment to multiformity. These three examples demonstrate that Bavinck's collection of meditations for the Lord's Supper can contribute much to formation within the neo-Calvinist tradition. I will refer again to this work in Chapter Five in my development of a renewed approach for Christian cultural engagement.

2.8 Klaas Schilder's *Christ and Culture*

Born in Kampen in 1890, Schilder was influenced by the neo-Calvinist theology of Kuyper and Bavinck as he undertook theological training to become a Dutch Reformed minister. He later became Professor of Systematic Theology at Kampen Seminary. Forced into hiding during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands because of his outspoken views against Hitler, Schilder's development of neo-Calvinism for cultural engagement bears the hallmarks of his scarred life. For example, his theology is rich with apocalyptic imagery from the Bible and his description of the degeneration of "culture" towards the end of the age centres around the antichrist to whom he refers as a dictator.[291] However, despite a largely pessimistic outlook on the future of cultural

[288] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 30.

[289] Kuyper is emphatic that this is only possible because of Christ. It is in Christ that grace and nature hold together. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 173.

[290] Continuing the theme of grace and nature, Bavinck writes: "For grace does not suppress and abolish nature but restores and renews her and yet increases the natural diversity with the diversity of spiritual gifts." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 70.

[291] Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. G. van Rongen and W. Helder (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Printing, 1977), 35, https://spindleworks.com/library/schilder/ChristnCulture.pdf.

development, an outlook that is based upon an over-emphasis on the theological concept of the antithesis, *Christ and Culture* provides some important insights into the continued neo-Calvinist wrestling with cultural engagement.

2.8.1 Schilder and "culture"

First written in 1932, the essay was revised following a visit to the United States of America in 1947. This was not a collection of immature, random thoughts, but rich theology standing in a strong tradition and having suffered the refinements of a turbulent historical context. While Schilder's treatment of cultural engagement differs from Abraham Kuyper's, and his criticisms of his forerunner are sharp, it is an important short work in the canon of neo-Calvinism theological cultural engagement. I will briefly expand four areas from *Christ and Culture* which bear particular relevance for this thesis: 1) Schilder's acknowledgement of the complexity of cultural development; 2) the "cultural mandate" as a command for all human beings in which abstinence from cultural development for the Christian is not an option; 3) the *sinousia*, or common "being-together" of all humanity; 4) Schilder's dismissal of Kuyper's "common grace" as a basis for the continuation of cultural development after the Fall.

2.8.2 "Culture" is complex

From the outset Schilder acknowledges that the issues surrounding a discussion about Christianity and "culture" raise complex questions not least because of the ambiguity of the term "culture." For example, he asks: "Are we talking about culture as such (*the* culture) or only about a certain kind of culture? Is there indeed *a* permanent *culture*, which may be known by the peculiar style to which it is faithful, or do we, if we keenly discern things, find only a chaos of cultural *tendencies*?"[292] These are anthropological questions in the hands of a theologian who uses them to explain that Christianity and "culture" do not stand on opposing sides because this is not in the nature of

[292] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 5.

either. In fact, Christianity is cultural in that it takes varying cultural forms depending on geographical, social, and historical contexts.[293]

This is a helpful stance from within neo-Calvinism and important for a dialogue with cultural anthropology. Instead of viewing "culture" as an essential object, Schilder locates cultural endeavours, the cultivation of the material of earth, and subsequent cultural development firmly within the two doctrines: that of creation and that of Christ. Although Schilder's Christology is important for his understanding of the antithesis and rejection of Kuyper's common grace, it is his explanation of the mandate given to humanity at the start of creation to cultivate and flourish that is of most relevance to a dialogue with cultural anthropology.

2.8.3 The "Cultural Mandate"

For Schilder, the turning point in beginning to unravel the complex meaning of "culture" lies in the origin of creation: "For here alone we come to the possibility of working out the above-given, still only provisional, concept of culture. For culture is a word that can be found on the first page of the Bible: "Dress the garden, replenish the earth, be fruitful and multiply.""[294] This is what Schilder refers to as the "cultural mandate," a command which has not been set aside since the beginning of creation, nor inhibited by sin.[295] It is a command which is earthy and hands-on; and originally culture-building was a liturgical exercise, performed in the context of service to God. Therefore, all good cultural labours may be counted spiritual for the Christian, rather than there being a hierarchy of service in which traditional church ministry is at the top.[296] From this reading of Genesis and with the cultural mandate providing a foundation for the cultural concept, Schilder attempts his own definition of culture:

> The systematic endeavour towards the process-wise acquisition of the aggregate of labour by the sum total of human beings as they belong to God, evolve themselves unto God in history with and for the cosmos, and are present at any historical moment, having assumed the task of disclosing the potencies lying dormant in creation and successively coming with reach in the

[293] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 5.
[294] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 20.
[295] In fact, Schilder states that it is a sin to abstain from "cultural labour" because of the cultural mandate. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 39.
[296] All can fulfil the cultural mandate, whether a "kitchen-worker" or Beethoven. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 22.

> course of the history of the world, of developing them in compliance with their individual natures, of making them subservient to their environment, both far and near, according to their cosmic relationships and in submission to the norms of God's revealed truth; and all this in order to make the treasures thus acquired usable by man as liturgical creature, and, subsequently, to bring them, together the now more thoroughly equipped man himself, before God and put them at his feet, in order that he may be all in all, and every work may praise its Master.[297]

2.8.4 Defining "culture" theologically

This attempt at a definition elucidates Schilder's presuppositions as he addresses the issue of Christ and culture: firstly, it is only through cultural endeavours that the full measure of the bounty of creation can be realised. Secondly, the cultivation of creation was in the first instance intended to be undertaken in a righteous relationship with God and in accordance with God's other commands. Thirdly, this original purpose remains but it is only the believer who truly cultivates creation as the Creator intended. Fourthly, unbelievers are still caught up in the cultural mandate and still contribute to the fulfilling of creation's potential, yet the motivation for their cultural endeavour is inevitably contrary to the original design. Schilder here is developing the Reformed doctrine of creation while preserving continuity with the idea of the antithesis which runs throughout humanity between the Creator and his creatures because of sin. However, despite this antithesis which dogs Schilder's theological writing on culture, he does concede that all human beings, whether believers or not, are still charged with the command to cultivate creation.

2.8.5 Commonness and the Antithesis

Sinousia is the term Schilder gives to the common-ness of humanity in their natural desire to build culture. All humans have been given the command to do so and in this there is a "being together."[298] Because of the repeated emphasis on the antithesis and the difference in direction between "culture" building undertaken by believers and unbelievers, this *sinousia* is not meant by Schilder to justify compromise and syncretism on the part of believers. However, Richard

[297] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 22.
[298] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 7.

Mouw refers to Schilder's *sinousia* in addressing matters of civil society in North America as a basis for public discourse between human beings, believers and unbelievers alike.[299] He argues that despite the pessimism of the antithesis, *sinousia* implies a common ground for cultural endeavours such as working towards justice in society. Schilder himself concedes that the cultural works of humanity are mixed up because believers and unbelievers have not been separated and that unbelievers still contribute to cultural development.[300] This "being-together" of humanity and the existence of the cultural mandate rooted within each person is Schilder's foundation for cultural endeavours rather than a Kuyperian appeal to a "common grace."

2.8.6 Criticisms of Common Grace and Sphere Sovereignty

Schilder criticises Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and his distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism, but it is the concept of common grace that is decimated in *Christ and Culture*. He argues that the mere existence of "culture" and the fact that man undertakes cultural endeavours does not justify the use of the concept of "common grace."[301] His argument with Kuyper is twofold: firstly, common grace assumes that the gifts of God's creation have been left to us to dispose of as we choose rather than remaining within the context of the relationship between Creator and creature that underpins the cultural mandate. Cultural endeavour cannot, according to Schilder, be separated from obedience, obedience is only possible where regeneration has taken place, i.e. in the life of a believer.[302] Cultural "labours," while common to all humanity, are either performed in faith because of *saving* grace, or in unbelief. There is no category of grace which is common to all humanity regardless of their standing with God. Secondly, common grace is not a sufficient explanation of God's restraint in his creation. If we speak of judgment being restrained through a common "grace" then we must also speak of another restraint: that of the fullness of blessing that has come through

[299] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 138.
[300] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 32.
[301] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 25.
[302] Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 29.

Christ's redemptive and recapitulative work through atonement, resurrection and ascension.[303]

In the age to come, Schilder implies, judgement will have been dealt with and grace in all its fullness will have been unleashed, therefore "culture" building will have come into its own. In this current age, while believers and unbelievers labour side by side in cultivating creation, both grace and judgment are restrained, therefore only to speak of a common grace is misleading and incorrect.[304] Common grace, in Schilder's view seems to devalue cultural work, and the role of the church in bearing the light of Christ in the world, whereas placing cultivation of creation as imperative and essential to humanity provides a context of value and meaning to culture-building which is lacking in common grace, and returns the idea of "grace" to the mission of the church.

2.8.7 Arguments from the antithesis

Despite the positivity with which Schilder treats cultural development, his descriptions of cultural engagement are thoroughly founded upon the Reformed concept of the antithesis which creates a sharp divide between the cultural work produced by believers and that produced by unbelievers. I will examine the antithesis in more detail in the following chapter but here I will offer some useful insights from Richard Mouw. He explains that there are difficulties with the category of common grace not least because using the word "grace" to refer to two distinct theological ideas creates confusion and the potential danger of attributing to "common grace" what should exclusively belong to "saving grace."[305]

2.8.8 Schilder and the later Kuyper

Schilder also draws attention to Kuyper's later theology which veers further away from the antithesis and closer towards non-Reformed and even non-Christian political and philosophical thought, a danger which Kuyper's critics are

[303] Schilder writes: "All the carts are still held in check, all the horses are bridled. Judgement is held back, but so is grace, in *this* world." Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

[304] Schilder refers to this restraint as a "common tempering" but he argues that this has no bearing on cultural development as a cause, contrary to Kuyper's view of common grace Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

[305] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 142.

quick to highlight.[306] For example, Donald Carson criticises three unhelpful directions of Kuyper's later theology.[307] Firstly, Carson indicates that Kuyper's emphasis on the antithesis lessened over time, and instead he put a "disproportionate emphasis" on creation and on common grace.[308] Carson goes on to suggest that this directly influenced the decline of Christian influence on Dutch society, along with an emphasis on "presumptive regeneration."[309] Finally, Carson suggests that it was "Kuyper's personal piety" that made his ideas so attractive, but that this is a dangerous reason to turn these ideas into a strategy for cultural transformation.[310] Despite these criticisms of Kuyper, however, Mouw suggests that Schilder has not utterly rejected the idea of God's power at work even among unbelievers which support grounds for the cultivation of civil society and public piety.[311] On this reading, Kuyper and Schilder are not irreconcilable and together with Bavinck provide neo-Calvinism with a distinctive emphasis upon cultural development as being of value and meaning and fully of purpose in the history of the creation.

2.9 Conclusion: Neo-Calvinism as Dialogue Partner

This chapter has demonstrated the weight of Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism in practical and theological terms and given evidence for the application of the Reformed tradition to the organisation and meaning and purpose of human society. I have shown how this application is manifested through the Kuyperian themes of common grace, sphere sovereignty, the antithesis, the distinction between the church as institute and organism, and the four terrains of "culture" which display the influence of common and special grace to greater and lesser degrees. I have illustrated how Kuyper's theology influenced his politics with his

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[306] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 131-132.

[307] He begins with a brief outline of Kuyper's thinking in the earlier part of his life, and quotes the same phrase regarding Christ's sovereignty over the cosmos as Keller does in his critique of the Transformationist model. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 214.

[308] Carson invokes Schilder here, arguing that Kuyper has moved away from the central Biblical storyline. Carson, *Christ and Culture*, 215.

[309] Carson does concede that some of these problems arose as others developed Kuyperianism. Carson, *Christ and Culture*, 216.

[310] In a rather dramatic statement Carson writes, "When Kuyperianism, a branch of European Reformed theology, becomes the intellectual structure on which we ground our attempts to influence the culture, yet cuts itself loose from, say, the piety of the Heidelberg Confession, the price is sudden death." Carson, *Christ and Culture*, 216.

[311] Mouw writes: "Given the larger strengths of the antitheticalist Reformed perspective, we ought diligently to explore any resources that this perspective offers – even in the form of phrases that seem to be dropped gratuitously in the middle of otherwise rather harsh warnings against worldly alliances." Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 144.

presupposition of all things holding together in Christ, and his trajectory of the whole of society being permeated with the light of special grace. With the introduction of Bavinck and Schilder, this chapter has described how Kuyper's neo-Calvinism was developed and critiqued by two of his contemporaries. Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* did not only organise Kuyperian ideas systematically, they also provided an opportunity for the theologian to push back the boundaries of creation theology and dig deeper into the foundations of Kuyper's common grace. Schilder's critique of Kuyper in *Christ and Culture* provides a sobering reminder of his historical context, and with it the power of hostile forces in the world which stand in complete opposition to Christ and bring about destruction and chaos socially, nationally, and globally.

2.9.1 The value of ongoing questions

In conclusion, it is Kuyper's theology which still stands as the broadest and deepest exploration of neo-Calvinism. Neither his thinking nor his probing was exhaustive, and he has left unanswered questions; for example, can there really be a true commonness between individuals who hold different worldviews or is Schilder right to uphold the idea of the antithesis in society and minimise the efficiency of common grace? Is it naïve to believe that society can ever provide liberty enough for Christian activity to flourish outside of the sphere of the institutional church? Is sphere sovereignty still a viable theological concept to pursue and develop given the deeply destructive consequences of its application to race, ethnicity, and gender? These questions constitute fertile ground for today's neo-Calvinism in many ways, and, for the purpose of this thesis, makes neo-Calvinism a vital dialogue partner for cultural anthropology.

2.9.2 Neo-Calvinism as a complex movement

That Kuyper's neo-Calvinism is firmly rooted in the belief that Christ rules over all, and that the Reformed confessions provide the best possible foundation for human flourishing is not a stumbling block for a dialogue with cultural anthropology; it is the presuppositional nature of neo-Calvinism which gives the movement the substance it needs to participate in this dialogue. From a Kuyperian perspective, it is the presuppositional nature of neo-Calvinism that leads to a free society and liberty of conscience, to the establishment of equal

rights for all citizens, to the expression of commonness as well as to the respect of differences, to an end to coercion by the state, to the outpouring of compassion for the vulnerable and marginalised, and mutual relationships between the spheres under Christ which leads to the common good and human flourishing.[312] In view of the complexities present in Kuyperianism, it is vital that any development of sphere sovereignty is fully tempered and held accountable by Kuyper's own commitment to social justice, and that this commitment is extended to all complex expressions of the cultural "other" in a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

[312] Turnau, Strange, and Carson approach theological cultural engagement with presuppositions. These presuppositions are founded upon the same Reformed doctrines as Kuyper's. The difference lies in the application of those presuppositions, with questions to be asked about how those presuppositions relate to cultural complexity, to liberty of conscience, to freedom of belief and other Kuyperian principles. For example, see Turnau, *Popologetics*, 8.

Chapter Three: Contemporary Neo-Calvinism and the Cultural "Other"

3.1 Introduction: Kuyper's Continuing Influence

Is it possible for any approach to Christian cultural engagement to take seriously the complexities of cultural realities? This thesis suggests that the development of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement is possible through a dialogue between neo-Calvinism cultural anthropology. As stated in Chapter One, this dialogue will lead to an integration of the concerns of both disciplines regarding the following three themes: 1) that our complex cultural worlds, or spheres, are both meaningful and undefinable; 2) multiple perspectives arise from cultural complexity and pluriformity, therefore cultural engagement must approach the cultural "other" in context; 3) when Christian cultural engagement takes a positive view of creation it will seek the flourishing of the cultural "other" by giving meaning and purpose to cultural works. This chapter is the second part of a literature review in neo-Calvinism, intended to demonstrate the development of the Kuyperian foundations for social and cultural engagement by contemporary neo-Calvinists, and how they relate to a renewed approach described above. What is discussed below will also reveal the suitability of neo-Calvinism as a dialogue partner with cultural anthropology.

3.1.1 A contemporary application of Kuyperian themes

The first part of the literature review focussed on two major neo-Calvinist themes: common grace and sphere sovereignty and their outworking through Kuyper's concepts of the antithesis, the church as institute and organism, and four distinct terrains of society. I selected these specific themes because they formed the foundation for the application of neo-Calvinism to "cultural renewal" in Kuyper's era, and featured in the subsequent neo-Calvinist theologies of Bavinck and Schilder.[313] Contemporary neo-Calvinist scholars continue to wrestle with and develop the work of Kuyper, Bavinck and Schilder, and this chapter will be structured around their work in the following areas. Beginning with an analysis of the Reformed worldview in which cultural complexity and diversity are integral, I will consider how "culture" is defined by the belief that

[313] Mouw uses the phrase "cultural renewal" as a description of Kuyper's purpose. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 15.

cultural activity and development is meaningful. Following this I will describe how contemporary neo-Calvinists also define "culture" by context and suggest that this upholds cultural complexity while allowing for theological faithfulness and orthodoxy. Finally, I will discuss the impact of holding a view of creation which gives cultural activity purpose and meaning and drives cultural engagement towards cultural transformation in such a way that pursues the good of the cultural "other".

3.1.2 Contemporary scholarship

In this chapter I will refer to specific scholars and theologians who represent contemporary Kuyperianism either explicitly or implicitly. Providing a neo-Calvinist insights from North America, South Africa, and the UK, the main voices in this chapter include Richard Mouw, Albert Wolters, Russel Botman, Vincent Bacote, Elaine Storkey, and Jonathan Chaplin. To provide some contrast, I will also refer to the practical theology of Timothy Keller which reflects Kuyperian influences, although he would not call himself a neo-Calvinist.[314] This chapter will also benefit from the voices of scholars who may not all refer to themselves as neo-Calvinists but have been influenced by Kuyperianism and who have in turn influenced Reformed thinking over the last century: Herman Dooyeweerd, George Marsden, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

3.1.3 Kuyper's continuing influence

A continually maturing neo-Calvinist theological cultural engagement with and in diverse spheres is important for establishing a dialogue with cultural anthropology, which is the subject of this thesis. Although Kuyperian theology and influence continued to be explored and felt through the 20th century, there has been what might be termed a vital resurgence of neo-Calvinism within the Reformed tradition in the last two decades, with the younger generation picking up the mantle of their forebears. This was Kuyper's hope; that Calvinism would

[314] Despite not readily falling into the category of neo-Calvinism, Keller's work of gospel contextualization commended him for the Kuyper Prize in 2017. The prize is awarded to individuals who, through their work in a particular sphere, reflect neo-Calvinist values of cultural, social, and political engagement and influence. For example, the 2019 Kuyper prize was awarded to John M. Perkins. Matt Kucinski, "John M. Perkins Awarded the 2019 Kuyper Prize," Calvin College, published February 04, 2019, https://calvin.edu/news/archive/john-m-perkins-awarded-2019-kuyper-prize.

continue to be renewed in contemporary contexts.[315] In North America, theological centres like Fuller Theological Seminary and Calvin College, along with Canadian Institute for Christian Studies and Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University, along with many other groups and centres, are training new scholars to engage with their contemporary social, cultural, and political environments theologically.[316] In The Netherlands scholarship continues at the university which Kuyper founded in 1880, the Vrije Universiteit, and in the Theologische Universiteit Kampen van de Gereformeerde Kerken;[317] Kampen being the birthplace of Klaas Schilder.

3.1.4 Contemporary application of neo-Calvinist themes

If dialogue is to be established, the neo-Calvinist themes discussed in the previous chapter must be integrated into a contemporary worldview that effects cultural engagement in order to move beyond proposing theological concepts in a dialectical approach. Kuyper worked out his theology in a specific context and consequently it could be said that his was an applied Calvinism; a practical updating of Reformed theology for a new cultural climate. This practicality led Kuyper to pursue cultural transformation not by imposition of a worldview, but through cultural participation as a holder of a specific worldview. No scholar in this movement is untouched by Kuyper's "social program", and others who

[315] Kuyper never advocated a mere preservation of Calvinism; rather he insisted on a continual returning "to the living root of the Calvinist past, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in modern times, and with the demands of the times to come." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

[316] In January 2016 Calvin college recognised the combined theological weight of four "elders" of Reformed scholarship and invited them to jointly present a lecture entitled "The Renaissance of Christian Thought." These scholars were Richard Mouw, George Marsden, Alvin Plantinga, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. "Renaissance of Christian Thought - Marsden, Mouw, Plantinga, Wolterstorff," Calvin College, January 08, 2016, video, 1:00:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjqsaD1k-NM&index=1&list=PLVB3DnzqdR8d8P7sSQdUEp7hP5OA4D5Ko. In this lecture, Wolterstorff explains that the development of a Christian worldview happened through the intentional application of the medieval rubric of Anselm of faith seeking understanding.

[317] Students at Fuller Theological Seminary have the opportunity to take part in an exchange programme with the Vrije Universiteit and in conjunction with the Kampen Theological College, working under the supervision of neo-Calvinist scholars such as Cornelis van der Kooi and George Harinck. Harinck is also a Kuyper historian and co-founder of the bi-annual international neo-Calvinist conferences.

remain broadly in the Reformed tradition cannot help but be influenced by or engaged with neo-Calvinism in some form.[318]

3.1.5 Worldview as quintessential

An example of the integration of the Kuyperian worldview into cultural participation is found in the writing of political scientist Robert Joustra. Standing in the Kuyperian tradition, Joustra writes about the importance of developing a worldview of compassion among Reformed Christians that causes them to act with justice for the transformation of society. Referring to Kuyper's distinction between the church as an institute and the church as an organism, Joustra argues that it is the role of the institutional church to disciple its members in matters of justice, equipping Christians to put these matters into practice in whatever way is most appropriate for them. In fact, helping Christians to "constructively disagree" on political issues, Joustra argues, will lead to positive "civil disagreement." In fact, it is in this applied theology that the Kuyperian distinction between institute and organism is seen in a positive light.[319] This is cultural participation by those who hold a particular worldview; a Reformed, neo-Calvinist worldview that looks to cultural transformation by persuasion, not by imposition. It is this all-encompassing worldview that is at the heart of neo-Calvinism, that gives impetus to Kuyper's social vision, and that shapes the concerns of contemporary neo-Calvinism.

3.1.6 A reformational worldview

In his book *Creation Regained,* neo-Calvinist scholar, Albert Wolters, explores the possibility of a Christian worldview which is shaped by a reformed understanding of Scripture.[320] Wolters suggests that this type of worldview

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[318] Dutch scholars Cornelis van der Kooi and Gisjbert van den Brink refer to Kuyper's purpose as a "social program" highlighting its "strong link between theology and society" and acclaiming the adoption of this approach in North American theological cultural engagement. Cornelis van der Kooi and Gisjbert van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 638.

[319] Joustra writes, "Christians like me will be out there joining parties, debating platforms, researching with think tanks, and teaching the next generation to do the same. We won't be *using* the church to do so, we'll be the *result* of the church preaching the gospel." Robert Joustra, "We Need to Talk About Justice," The Banner, published July 28, 2017, https://thebanner.org/departments/2017/07/we-need-to-talk-about-justice.

[320] Wolters is a product of both Calvin College and the Vrije Universiteit; he is now emeritus Professor of Theology and Religion at Redeemer University College, Ontario. Wolters writes that "it is the command of the gospel that we live our lives in conformity with the beliefs

affects all aspects of life, not just matters pertaining to faith. This worldview is elaborated by Christian philosophy and Christian theology which he terms respectively, *structure* and *direction*, and is underpinned by the belief that "grace restores nature."[321] In other words the work of God in Jesus Christ restores the totality of creation to its intended glory and purpose: this is the Reformational worldview.[322] He denotes the creating and providential work of God as law, either given directly in the form of natural laws or indirectly in the form of norms in human society. Both forms of given law are united in God's one law for the whole of creation.[323] A reformational worldview, while taking into account the first type of law-giving, is mainly concerned with interpreting God's norms for human society, and by implication, for human cultural development. Wolters claims that "human civilization is normed throughout,"[324] giving the example of social institutions which operate with specific features that distinguish them from each other, like marriage and the church. His examples demonstrate the wide-reaching effects of God's indirect laws for human development, and the argument that part of the purpose for creation is the revelation of God's wisdom.[325] This is similar to Kuyper's idea of *coram Deo*: that the whole of life is lived before the face of God for believer and unbeliever. For the purposes of this thesis, the task of interpreting God's purposes for human society has profound implications for the cultural "other" and the upholding of cultural complexity in Christian cultural engagement.

taught in the Scriptures." Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 6.

[321] As explained in the previous chapter, this belief is intrinsic to the theology particularly of Kuyper and Bavinck. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12.

[322] The use of the word "creation" is important here: Wolters distinguishes between God's activity of creation (verb) and the created order (noun). God's activity of creation is not confined to the Genesis account either; instead Wolters refers to "the acts of God's sovereignty by which he constitutes and upholds the totality of reality." Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 15?

[323] This is clearly *not* a two-kingdoms philosophy by another name. Wolters emphasises that they are not two different kinds of laws for two different kinds of kingdoms, but one law for one sovereign rule, given in two different but complementary ways. See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 16, 19.

[324] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 25.

[325] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 33. Wolters highlights the inconsistency of this belief amongst Christians, some of whom believe that the fall has made creation incomprehensible as far as knowing something about God is concerned, and some of whom believe that sin has affected humans so profoundly that even if creation does reveal something of God's wisdom, humans cannot perceive it.

3.2 Worldview and the Complex, Cultural "Other"

Richard Mouw is a Reformed theologian teaching in the context of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.[326] He describes his background as "evangelical" and "pietistic" although it is the Reformed tradition that he has adopted in his scholarship and theology.[327] His work has developed an approach to public theology in the Kuyperian tradition, which is to be understood as an application of Calvinist theology to civil society, and the challenges and opportunities this application poses for Christians in the Reformed tradition as well as the impact of this theology upon civil society.[328] According to Mouw, this "neo-Calvinism" perceives intrinsic value in human cultural development for the reason that "God's renewing purposes aim at the reclaiming of the whole creation."[329] All of humanity can be involved and contribute to the divine plan of the renewal of creation which will only be fully realized at the eschaton.[330] The primary themes of this thesis may be read into the above theological statements: that cultural worlds are at the same time meaningful and indefinable because of their complexities, that any approach to the cultural "other' should be contextual in nature and theologically faithful, and that the cultivation and harvest of creation is inextricably bound to the meaning and value of cultural activity. In this section I will consider how "culture" is defined in the context of a neo-Calvinist worldview and what that means for cultural complexity and a dialogue with cultural anthropology.

3.2.1 A philosophy for the whole of life

Christian apologist and philosopher Alvin Plantinga explains that a common view of Christian philosophy is that it is "a disinterested attempt to answer a set of questions about the nature of reality."[331] However, Plantinga challenges this view by arguing that there is no reason why there cannot be explicitly Christian

[326] Mouw provides a fascinating and insightful history of Calvinism in Holland and its migration to North America, a migration which owed a great deal to Abraham Kuyper's influence upon North American Reformed theological development. See, e.g., Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 233.

[327] Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,2001), 2.

[328] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 3.

[329] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 11.

[330] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 15.

[331] "Renaissance of Christian Thought."

philosophy; philosophy that begins with Christian ideas. When we take the Christian story for granted in our philosophy, we are is simply using everything we know about a subject to think about it philosophically, even the idea of faith; otherwise we are artificially limiting ourselves to only a part of what we know.[332] Scholar George Marsden concurs in his application of a Kuyperian worldview to the academic sphere: he argues that Christians should be free to approach scholarship from a specifically Christian set of values rather than putting them aside when they undertake scholarly pursuits.[333] The driving force behind this is a Christian worldview which affects how Christian academics approach knowledge: Marsden argues that this can produce "an intellectually richer culture."[334] Marsden demonstrates here the Kuyperian worldview in that every believer lives before the face of God in all spheres of society and cultural life; there is also an appeal to freedom of conscience. There can be a Christian starting point for everything, because Christ rules every square inch of creation.[335] However, where does this leave the notion of cultural complexity? Is it ruled out in this Christian, Kuyperian worldview?

3.2.2 A broader evangelicalism

A Kuyperian worldview will not lead to a denial of cultural complexity: for example, it leads to a broader evangelicalism because of its emphasis on the whole of life. It encourages ecumenical dialogue, particularly in terms of scholarship, and therefore is able to have a wider impact on society. Reformed scholar Nicholas Wolterstorff draws attention to the humility and non-defensiveness of looking at philosophical issues through the eyes of faith and

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[332] From Plantinga's work we understand that belief in God is "properly basic," and that faith and reason are not at odds in the Christian worldview. Therefore, it is inevitable that he, along with Marsden, should argue for specifically Christian philosophy and scholarship. See e.g., Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Platinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983),73-74.

[333] Academically, Marsden argues for faith to inform scholarship on every level and as far as possible upholds a spirit of liberalism. See e.g. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

[334] Marsden, *Christian Scholarship*, 111.

[335] An example of this presuppositional approach of in Plantinga is his arguments for a relationship between Christianity and science. Because of the starting point for Christian philosophy, even the conflicts which arise between the evidence base for modern science and certain tenets of Christian belief do not carry sufficient weight to prevent concordance between the two. See e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xvii

engaging in philosophy with a Christian mind and Christian sensibilities.[336] Wolterstorff, Plantinga and Marsden demonstrate how faithfulness to the Reformed tradition and dialogue with different worldview starting-points are not in opposition but in relationship. This broader view of engaging with other worldviews suggests that there is room in the Kuyperian approach to cultural engagement for cultural complexity, and that this complexity may be upheld through dialogue with diverse social and cultural groups.

3.2.3 A common grace worldview

An example of how the Kuyperian worldview enables cultural engagement is found in Mouw's essay entitled, "Culture, Church, and Civil Society." Mouw describes his personal struggle between the exclusivity of evangelical pietism, which was his religious background, and his growing compulsion to be involved in society to work for the common good.[337] Mouw's research into and development of Kuyperian approaches to theology in the public square have been as a result of this struggle; in particular his work on common grace in cultural engagement.[338] For example, Kuyper's theological development of Calvinism grew out of a historical and ecclesiological context which included the breakdown and disunity of relations within the Dutch Reformed church in the Netherlands, and this is the most appropriate framework in which to understand it.[339] Yet, part of Mouw's updating of Kuyperianism involves connecting Kuyper's theological ideas with other Christian denominations and traditions, admitting that he needs "a lot of theological help from Christians who have cultivated some rather different theological specializations."[340]

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[336] In addition to the ecumenical relationship that he and Alvin Plantinga formed with scholars at Notre Dame University, they have also interacted with non-Christian philosophers *qua* philosophers. This collaborative approach opened up philosophical discussions to the extent that in 1978 they formed an ecumenical society of Christian philosophers although the dominant traditions were Reformed and Catholic.

[337] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 18.

[338] For example, he admits to having spent four decades examining the concept of common grace only to come to the conclusion that while he is convicted it is a theological certainty, he does not claim to understand its substance. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair*, 13.

[339] Kuyper's development connects first and foremost with the Reformed tradition because this is the tradition within which he was operating. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 78.

[340] Richard J. Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport: Making Connections in Today's World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 121.

3.2.4 Common grace and civility

Mouw's application of common grace in his scholarship and practice may be found in his work on "evangelical civility," which includes intrafaith and interfaith dialogue with other traditions and other faiths.[341] Common grace and commonness play out in these dialogues partly through Mouw's willingness to engage with different communities in the first place, but also partly through his "bracketing" of key evangelical presuppositions in order for respectful dialogue to take place.[342] Putting oneself into the mindset of the person with whom one is engaging in order to empathise with their position and belief system can lead to genuine and humble dialogue, and "a spirit of genuine learning" may lead to a meaningful and respectful engagement.[343] This is an embrace of cultural diversity and an acknowledgment of the reality of cultural complexity.

3.2.5 Commonness and many-ness

Diversity in creation belongs to the category of common grace and in the Kuyperian tradition diversity, or pluriformity, is necessary for human cultural development.[344] Of Kuyper, Mouw writes: "[Kuyper] was convinced that God himself loves many-ness. Indeed, on his reading of the biblical account, the Creator had deliberately woven many-ness into the very fabric of creation."[345] This foundational, creational "many-ness" was necessary for life, and cultural expressions, to flourish in a fresh and vigorous manner.[346] Cultural diversity is therefore to be celebrated by Christians, and by extension, in theology.[347] Cultural diversity leads to helpful distinctions between individuals and groups;

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[341] Mouw writes, "Generally, my dialogue involvements with representatives of nonevangelical (including non-Christian) religious communities have actually been a mixture of intra and inter." These dialogues have included those with Jews and Muslims, in which the uniting factor has been the Abrahamic foundation, and also with Catholics and Mormons. Mouw, *Adventures*, 179.

[342] The idea of "bracketing" is taken from Bavinck's interpretation of the Christian approach to other religions which posits that the traditional presuppositions of evangelism and apologetics are no longer appropriate. This does not suggest that those presuppositions are not still valid, but it is to suggest an approach where questions to do with salvation and the revelation of God in the Bible are not the first questions we bring to religious dialogue. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 183-185.

[343] Mouw, *Adventures*, 186.

[344] Mouw describes God as having an "infinite imagination;" diversity flows from him. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 82.

[345] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 17.

[346] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 18.

[347] This does not mean that Reformed Christians should shy away from celebrating cultural diversity: quite the opposite. See Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 87.

these distinctions are an important part of Christian cultural engagement because they provide space for dialogue and discussion without the pressing need to conform all groups of people to one point of view. In fact, on this reading of Kuyper, cultural heterogeneity, in contrast to diversity, appears to stand in opposition to God's purposes for human cultural development and the flourishing of creation. Contemporary cultural engagement demands interaction with a variety of cultural communities at once.[348]

3.2.6 Cultural complexity and the divine image

With reference to Bavinck, Mouw comments that we might imagine cultural diversity as reflecting and developing the different facets "of the divine likeness" which will have its fulfilment at the eschaton.[349] This foundation for diversity is also the foundation for "commonness" between all human beings, both regenerate and unregenerate.[350] Diversity, and the commonness of people in their humanity are both significant for human flourishing which means that, in Mouw's words, "we have a mandate to promote the common good."[351] Embracing both diversity and commonness prepares the ground for cultural renewal. As described above, the *a priori* of Kuyper's public theology is the renewal of human society and involves the cultural contributions that all humans may make regardless of their understanding of God's redeeming and creative purposes for creation.[352] Upholding cultural diversity is integral to cultural renewal, and so must also be integral to any kind of Christian cultural engagement. Cultural diversity inevitably causes complex cultural relationships, meaning that cultural complexity must also be integral to Christian cultural

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[348] Mouw writes, "The ongoing discussion of "Christ and culture" has to expand to tackle the important contemporary agenda of "Christ and *the cultures*;" a discussion which is enlightened by Kuyper's younger colleague Herman Bavinck who refers to the fullness of cultural formation being realised by "the rich diversity of humankind spread over many times and many places." Cultural development is clearly an ongoing process that has a point of "fullness." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 84.

[349] Bavinck emphasises the multiplication command given in Genesis to humanity; a multiplication which is still continuing today which fits with his eschatology as explained in the previous chapter. Mouw, *Adventures*, 32.

[350] He refers to Schilder's rejection of the Kuyperian approach to cultural transformation and describes Schilder's idea of *sunousia,* which was described in the previous chapter as a togetherness of human beings, as being almost a concession on Schilder's part. Mouw, *Adventures*, 96.

[351] Mouw engages with Anabaptist suspicions of commonness explaining that even Jesus spoke and acted in the context of "the good creation." He writes: "No matter how perverse the processes and products of cultural formation have become, human beings still work within the structures of the good creation." Mouw, *Adventures*, 96.

[352] Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship*, 11.

engagement. Cultural complexity, as a result of the cultural diversity and commonness that arises from the divine likeness, is not something to be feared or to be solved. This neo-Calvinist, Kuyperian worldview of total cultural renewal through the whole of life being under the rule of Christ, and of cultural diversity arising intentionally from the divine image and necessary for creational flourishing, breathes life into a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

3.2.7 A presuppositional worldview

A Kuyperian worldview that is formed from within the Reformed tradition and faithful to Scripture might be termed a presuppositional worldview. However, a presuppositional worldview is able to engage with cultural complexity as can be seen in the social philosophy of the nineteenth Dutch Reformed philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd is described as "a remarkable and original philosopher and the most influential intellectual successor to the nineteenth-century Calvinist theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper."[353] Despite being heavily influenced by German philosophy, particularly neo-Kantianism, Dooyeweerd's greatest impetus lay in neo-Calvinism. He sought to create from the foundation of Kuyperian ideas a social philosophy that provided a more sophisticated thought-system than already existed, and which would lead to the renewal of Protestant Christianity, thus fulfilling Kuyper's vision.[354] Dooyeweerd argued for the existence of religious presuppositions which lay behind every social theory and philosophy and that it was crucial to understand these presuppositions, or "ground motives," in order to construct a purely biblical

[353] Political scientist Jonathan Chaplin connects Dooyeweerd to Kuyper strategically through the development of cultural theory and sphere sovereignty. Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 1. Chaplin credits Kuyper with "a strategic policy orientation by which it sought to define itself as a third way between liberal capitalism and socialist collectivism. Kuyper's core principle of sphere sovereignty played the central role in the neo-Calvinist articulation of this strategy." It is this heritage that plays out in Dooyeweerd's work. Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 23.

[354] Kuyper's vision was for a renewal of Calvinism in the future (Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.); Dooyeweerd realised that "a Calvinist theory of law could not be adequately formulated without an underlying Calvinist systematic *philosophy*, a view implied by some of Kuyper's statements but never fully articulated. It would not be enough to apply Calvinist *theological* principles directly to the field of law, or any other science. What was needed was a philosophical framework as broad in scope as that of Aristotle, Thomas, or Hegel, one that would furnish the theoretical foundations for work not only in law, but in every special discipline, including social and political theory." Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*.

philosophy of social pluralism.[355] Political scientisit Jonathan Chaplin writes: "The principal achievement of his social pluralism is the articulation of a complex, wide-ranging, and frequently illuminating theoretical account of multiple types of social institutions and relationships."[356]

3.2.8 A presuppositional worldview and cultural complexity

Dooyeweerd was concerned with the reality of being; being that only has meaning in terms of its relation to God the Creator. All of reality is governed by meaning, time, and law, with "two interlocking axes of order…within any and every existing phenomena."[357] These axes are "modal aspects" which are general, and "different types" which are particular and individual.[358] For example, a "family" will share general characteristics with other institutions which call themselves "family," but its way of being a family will be different to another family's way; "family" is shared, but families cannot be reduced into each other – they are distinct and irreducible.[359] Identifying what defines a social institution requires analysing their "many modal dimensions" to understand which are intrinsic them. Once this is ascertained we can discern how these dimensions interact with each other, and then predict how an institution will relate to other, different institutions. Dooyeweerd's presuppositional worldview was grounded in the biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption, affirming his philosophy that reality only has meaning in terms of God the Creator.[360] It is also a rich development of Kuyper's sphere

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[355] "Indeed it is precisely the operation of defective ground motives that have obstructed the development of a genuinely pluralistic social theory, one capable of resisting the constant tendencies towards either individualism or universalism – toward reducing society to merely contingent relations between individuals or construing it as some unitary, monistic whole." Chaplin, Dooyweerd, 30-31.

[356] Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 30-31.

[357] Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 31.

[358] Dooyeweerd identified fifteen modal aspects which are "mutually irreducible" but interrelated in such a way that each aspect finds true coherence in unity with all fifteen. See e.g., Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 59.

[359] Social institutions, according to Dooyeweerd's social theory, and modal theory, are disclosed over time; time having two directions: foundational and transcendental. Each aspect of a social institution is connected to the others but the aspects are not revealed all at the same time. The succession of modal aspects relates to the foundational direction of time, but the cumulation of modal aspects relate to the transcendental direction of time, meaning that there is a point in history where a social institution achieves fullness of meaning in a full disclosure. See e.g., Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 72-73.

[360] This is Dooyeweerd's "ground motive" or presupposition: "Claiming to stand in the line of Augustine, Calvin, and Kuyper, Dooyeweerd identifies the theme of God as absolutely sovereign creator as the indispensable foundation of biblical religion." Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 47.

sovereignty, particularly in his treatment of the state and its "founding and qualifying functions" of power and law.[361] Here is a clear example of how a presuppositional, neo-Kuyperian, reformational worldview embraces cultural complexity. I will refer again to this kind of social pluralism and its relevance to contextualisation in cultural engagement in the following section.

3.2.9 A dynamic Christian worldview

A Christian worldview indicates a desire to see the world as God sees it which Mouw refers to as a "beholding"; this beholding will influence how we approach all cultural engagement.[362] However, the updating of a Kuyperian worldview for a contemporary global context must inevitably mean a process of "worldviewing" which is dynamic and active.[363] In connecting this commitment to "worldviewing" with its Kuyperian, and Calvinist roots, Mouw adds that "God has lovingly provided his Word for us as we travel, so that when its light shines on our path, we see things we would have otherwise missed."[364] The historical, cultural, and social contexts faced by neo-Kuyperians as they seek to engage theologically with cultural processes and products remain Calvinistic in being subject to scrutiny under the Word of God. In this sense, a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement depends upon a distinctly Christian way of viewing the totality of life.

3.3 Defining "Culture" by Context

Approaching the complex cultural "other" requires a contextual approach; i.e., the cultural context of "the other" is a crucial aspect of any kind of theological engagement. Kuyperian sphere sovereignty upholds this view: the boundaries of individual spheres should be respected, not as a justification for segregation, but to allow for spheres to mutually flourish in their own right. Understanding the context of a societal sphere, a cultural group, or an individual, is an important

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[361] Chaplin describes Dooyeweerd as holding that power is fundamental to the function of the state but that it is subject to its "definitive normative purpose of establishing a regime of just law in society." Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 35.

[362] A Christian, or perhaps a specifically neo-Calvinist worldview implies certain things about how cultural ideas are understood and engaged with. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 92.

[363] Clearly, Kuyper never encountered realities such as terrorism, information technology, controversies over stem-cell research and liberal sexuality and gender laws, amongst others. These issues demand questions of any particular worldview. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 93.

[364] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 94.

factor in a cultural engagement that has the potential for cultural renewal. This requires the holding of multiple perspectives at once, corresponding to the "many-ness" of the flourishing of creation. Contextualisation includes a reapplication of Kuyper – a neo-Kuyperian approach – to contemporary cultural processes, situations, worlds, phenomena, as well as the individual cultural "other".[365] Contextualisation does not require an abandonment of orthodoxy but it does demand a reorientation of that orthodoxy to the context of the complex cultural "other". To this end, all theological cultural engagement must be fully tempered by an emphasis on justice. In this section I will consider how far contemporary neo-Calvinism is able to adopt a multiperspectival approach to engagement in terms of contextualisation, faithfulness to the tradition, and a commitment to the good of the cultural "other".

3.3.1 Kuyperian contextualisation

An example of a Reformed and Kuyperian approach to contextualisation is found in the theology and practice of Timothy Keller, former lead pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York.[366] During his almost three decades at Redeemer Presbyterian Church he developed a comprehensive strategy for engaging Christians with the diverse cultural contexts in which they live and work. Keller writes, "We had thought long and hard about the character and implications of the gospel and then long and hard about the culture of New York City, about the sensibilities of both Christians and non-Christians in our

[365] Despite being a self-confessed Kuyperian Calvinist, Mouw also refers to himself as a neo-Kuyperian who is in the business of refining and updating Kuyperian theology for the 21st Century. He compares this to the *aggiormento* (renewal) of the Catholic tradition. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 75-76.

[366] Timothy Keller, who is the final theologian under review in this chapter, was nominated for the Kuyper prize in 2017. However, the decision was taken to withhold the prize from being awarded after significant objections were raised. These objections regarded the theology of the Presbyterian Church in America which does not recognises the ordination of either women or members of the LGBTQ+ community. Keller upholds this theology, and therefore it was decided that awarding the Kuyper prize would be viewed as affirming his beliefs. That an institution like Princeton who has been the vanguard in advancing Kuyperian thought in North America should take this decision demonstrates the progress from Kuyper's views on women to the contemporary context. M. Craig Barnes, "Update on the Kuyper Prize," Princeton Theological Seminary, accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.ptsem.edu/news/update-on-the-kuyper-lecture-and-prize. Keller provides an interesting example of the discord and concord at work between the wider Reformed tradition and neo-Calvinism. For a further description of the issues surrounding the withdrawal of the Kuyper prize from Keller, as well as the spirit and purpose of the Kuyper prize see Richard J. Mouw, "From Kuyper to Keller: Why Princeton's Prize Reversal is so Ironic," *Christianity Today*, published March 27, 2017, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/march-web-only/kuyper-keller-princeton-seminary-ironic.html.

midst, and about the emotional and intellectual landscape of the center city."[367] This contextualisation upholds the complexity of cultural "other" in Christian cultural engagement.[368] It is also Kuyperian in character: prefacing his paragraph in which he commends the strategy of Keller's church in reconnecting "sacred" and "secular" life, Mouw explains that it has an underlying Kuyperian influence.[369] Indeed, giving further credence to the suggestion that Keller's mission strategy has neo-Calvinist overtones, Keller himself references Kuyper in his analysis of theological models for cultural engagement.[370] He describes Kuyper's worldview as one which gives purpose to all human activity, and consequently to cultural processes.[371]

Keller refers to the Kuyperian model as the "Transformationist" model and despite a clear bias towards Kuyper's worldview in the mission strategy he proceeds to provide a critique in which he raises some of the more negative tendencies of its development.[372] He describes his own approach as seeking a balance between various models of theological cultural engagement, which in itself demonstrates an inclination resonant with Mouw's. In fact, he turns to Kuyper once again in his argument for a greater understanding between the

[367] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 16.

[368] In *The Reason for God* Keller describes why it is necessary to apply Christian apologetics to a contemporary city context. Culture, he argues, is divided between a rapidly increasing scepticism on the one hand and a pluralistic system of beliefs. Keller has drawn these conclusions through biblical reflection upon the cultural surroundings of Manhattan. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (2008; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009), xv-xvi. Using the language of computer programming he calls this reflection a "middleware," saying that "between one's doctrinal beliefs and ministry practices should be a well-conceived vision for how to bring the gospel to bear on the particular cultural setting and historical moment." Keller, *Center Church*, 17.

[369] For example, Mouw describes that "Kuyperian materials" are given to church members. Mouw also highlights the fact that this is a development of Kuyper's practice in the sense that while the strategy depends upon Kuyperian principles of Christian vocations, Kuyper himself discouraged ecclesiastical sponsorship of the arts. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 101.

[370] Keller invokes Kuyper's famous phrase that ""there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"" Keller, *Center Church*, 186.

[371] It is an "understanding of ultimate reality and the meaning of life" which affects the whole of life, including the way in which Christians engage culture. Keller, *Center Church*, 186.

[372] He criticises firstly the idea of "worldview" suggesting along with scholar James K.A. Smith, that worldviews are a mixture of beliefs and experience; secondly he raises the danger of over-emphasising cultural engagement to the detriment of church ministry and the preaching of the gospel; thirdly, he claims that this model tends to be triumphalist and arrogant; fourthly, he argues that this model puts too much faith in politics to change society; finally, he suggests that the lure of power can be a danger for the Transformationist model. Keller, *Center Church*, 199-200.

character and role of the church in both its institutional and organic form.[373] Like Kuyper, Keller's "theological vision" underpins his entire work and significantly impacts his understanding and practice of engaging with the cultural practices of his New York City context.[374] In developing this vision Keller asks a series of questions; I quote this in full to demonstrate his intentions and objectives, and to show the vision's similarities to neo-Calvinist principles:

- What is the gospel, and how do we bring it to bear on the hearts of people today?
- What is this culture like, and how can we both connect to it and challenge it in our communication?
- Where are we located - city, suburb, town, rural area - and how does this affect our ministry?
- To what degree and how should Christians be involved in civic life and cultural production?
- How do the various ministries in a church - word and deed, community and instruction - relate to one another?
- How innovative will our church be and how traditional?
- How will our church relate to other churches in our city and region?
- How will we make our case to the culture about the truth of Christianity?[375]

This final point illustrates most clearly how far Keller expects the impact of theological cultural engagement to reach; it is to make the case for the Christian gospel in the cultural context within which his particular church is situated, and to effect to some degree cultural transformation.[376]

3.3.2 Contextualised church ministry

Although Keller stands in an orthodox Reformed position, he suggests that meaningful cultural engagement is only truly possible through the cultural contextualisation of the Christian gospel rather than the imposition of a religious

[373] As outlined in the previous chapter, this specifically Kuyperian view is that the institutional church is distinct from the organic church in its maintenance of the sacraments, liturgy, doctrine, and the teaching of the Christian gospel, and the organic church is distinct from the institutional church in that it consists of all Christians at all times in all places bringing the content of the Christian gospel into all spheres of life. Keller, *Center Church*, 240.

[374] It is important to remember that this context is specifically a pastoral ministry context therefore the questions relate to the life of a church, rather than theological principles. Keller, *Center Church*, 18.

[375] Keller, *Center Church*, 18.

[376] He writes, "So what is a theological vision? It is a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history." Keller, *Center Church*, 18.

system.[377] For Keller, contextualisation of the Christian gospel is the framework for meaningful cultural engagement.[378] Understanding and identifying with the cultural context in which one seeks to contextualize the gospel is the vital first part of this process, so that it becomes possible to relate the Christian gospel to the needs and aspirations of that cultural context.[379] However, this approach to cultural engagement may be closer to the approaches of Strange and Turnau whose cultural engagements are criticised in the Introduction to this thesis.[380] Keller's emphasis is on cultural engagement and cultural renewal by way of the contextualisation of the Christian gospel through the ministry of the church. For example, like Strange's subversive fulfilment model, Keller refers to the apostle Paul in the Book of Acts who challenged the beliefs of the Athenians from within, not against, their own cultural context.[381] He suggests that identification with a culture is a careful approach and results in providing a credible platform for challenging, in order that a culture may perceive itself from the perspective of the Christian gospel.[382] This idea of challenge and confrontation diverges from the approaches of neo-Calvinists who find points of dialogue and connection. It may legitimately belong to the sphere of the institutional church,

[377] He writes that this is necessary to prevent turning "neutral cultural traits into moral virtue." Although his Reformed orthodoxy puts him under the authority of Christian scripture he acknowledges that there are some areas in which the bible "leaves our consciences free" to be "culturally flexible." Keller, *Center Church*, 116.

[378] This provides "a three-part process: *entering* the culture, *challenging* the culture, and *appealing* to the culture." Keller, *Center Church*, 116.

[379] This identification with the "culture" lays an important foundation for the next two parts of Keller's process of contextualisation, especially when it comes to relating gospel challenge to the affirmation of cultural beliefs: "So the first task of contextualisation is to immerse yourself in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture so you can give a biblical, gospel-centered response to its questions." Keller, *Center Church*, 121.

[380] Keller acknowledges the presence of the antithesis in every aspect of life, including the church, and that this leads to a critical reflection upon one's own cultural context. See e.g., Keller, *Center Church*, 121-122.

[381] The purpose of this challenge is not to condemn or colonize the cultural context with a foreign system, but in order to untangle right beliefs from unfulfilled cultural aspirations and reveal how the Christian gospel answers them. Keller, *Center Church*, 125.

[382] Keller describes this challenge process as a necessary "destabilising" process: "Having confronted, we now console, showing them that what they are looking for can only be found in Christ. Put another way, we show our listeners that the plotlines of their lives can only find a resolution, a "happy ending," in Jesus. *We must retell the culture's story in Jesus*." Keller, *Center Church*, 130.

but is this the only form of contextualisation available to a neo-Calvinism vision of cultural engagement?

3.3.3 Multiple perspectives and institutional pluralism

An example of a different kind of contextualisation for Christian cultural engagement is in the use of public justice in the making of political policies, as suggested in the reference to Robert Joustra earlier in this chapter. Political scientist Jonathan Chaplin, building on Dooyeweerd's social theory, selects four social institutions in which the state promotes public justice: "nation, family, church, and industry." [383] For Dooyeweerd, the state's role is to adjudicate the legal rights that arise from "complex, dynamic modern societies" in which various social institutions have their own version of law and power.[384] In his paper entitled, "Faith in the State: The Peril and Promise of Christian Politics," Chaplin explains that the neo-Calvinist idea of public justice is a characteristically protestant view of the state, in that the state is viewed as being under divine orders to carry out justice in society. Using a Dooyeweerdian idea, Chaplin also refers to public justice as institutional pluralism:

> Institutional pluralism is based on a recognition that human beings are created not only to live in political communities, but also in many other kinds of communities, groups or associations: families, friendships, neighbourhoods, community groups, educational institutions, producer groups, voluntary associations, churches, and many more – each making a unique, irreplaceable and complementary contribution to a flourishing human social existence.[385]

[383] Jonathan Chaplin is a leader in the application of neo-Calvinist theology to political science. Former director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Chaplin continues on the divinity faculty at Cambridge University, alongside his involvement with the Canadian Institute of Christian Studies and Center for Public Justice. For these reasons, and because of his close work with notable neo-Calvinists such as Bernard Zylstra and Al Wolters, and his development of neo-Calvinist philosopher Hermann Dooyeweerd, Chaplin's inclusion in this literature review is important. For example, Chaplin writes: "I also convey Dooyeweerd's characteristic insistence that as the state pursues public justice it must honour the unique sphere sovereignty of other structures and not trample on it." Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 37.

[384] Such diverse claims arise because there are plural spheres which exercise justice in their own right. Chaplin, *Dooyeweerd*, 36. Between these often-competing laws the state operates as arbitrator and for the public good, not its own ends. This is strongly reminiscent of Kuyper's ideas of the state being bound by the law of a person's free conscience and provides a strong demonstration of Dooyeweerd's neo-Calvinist influence.

[385] Jonathan Chaplin, *Faith in the State: The Peril and Promise of Christian Politics* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1999), 18.

In this perspicuous definition of institutional pluralism, Chaplin demonstrates the neo-Calvinist conviction of the state as adjudicator, alongside not in dominance over other social institutions, or in Kuyper's words, over other spheres.[386] In addition, the above description of institutional pluralism helps in understanding the relationship between the legal power of the state and each institution's "unique cluster of rights and responsibilities defined by its own distinctive structural purpose."[387] These rights and responsibilities extend to the individuals that make up a society, and bring us full circle once more to Kuyper's freedom of conscience.

A neo-Calvinist view of a pluralist society is vital to a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement because such a view of "complex, dynamic, modern societies" upholds the complexity of the cultural "other". This view offers a different perspective on cultural engagement to that of a ministry-centred contextualisation. It also places a higher value on diversity and complexity in its commitment to structural pluralism. In a pluralist society, cultural renewal can take place through Christian politics and a just state.[388] Pluralism guards against the dominance of any one social institution over another, and also against the assertion of individual rights where by doing so jeopardises the character of a particular institution's rights.[389] Chaplin raises the issue of religious and cultural pluralism which come as an inevitable result of structural pluralism and argues that another role of the state is to safeguard religious freedom insofar that it does not restrict or coerce members of society in their search for God.[390] Acknowledging that these ideas are not peculiarly Christian,

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[386] Chaplin defines the state "as *a political community of government and citizens empowered to promote public justice within its territory by means of law.*" Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 17.

[387] Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 19.

[388] In achieving Christian politics, political theology is necessary to reflect biblically upon politics and provide practical wisdom, as well as bringing government back to what Chaplin calls the "core question confronting every political actor every day: what is the *unique* role of government in society and how may it better discharge that role on behalf of its citizens?" Jonathan Chaplin, "Conclusion: Christian Political Wisdom," in *God and Government*, ed. Nick Spencer and Jonathan Chaplin (London: SPCK, 2008), 206.

[389] As per sphere sovereignty, social institutions carry within them authority which lessens the absolute power of the state. If a state seeks absolute power it is in its interest to minimise social institutions, subdue their rights, and promote the rights of individuals over and above their allegiances to various social institutions and communities. See e.g., Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 21.

[390] Chaplin attributes religious pluralism to the Fall and is at pains to differentiate between *structural* religious pluralism, i.e. religious pluralism that has come about through social pluralism, and *confessional* pluralism which relativizes all religion. Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 22 and Footnote 32 on page 34.

Chaplin writes that the ideas of institutional pluralism and public justice "opens up space for a distinctively Christian model of pluralism to contribute to reshaping the state in the direction of public justice."[391] Having space in society for all groups, not just Christian, to flourish is vital for freedom of conscience, equal rights and public justice; inevitably a pluralist society is the right environment for Christian cultural engagement, but it is nurtured in the first place *by* Christian cultural engagement.

3.3.4 Pluralism, the idolatry narrative, and common grace

From the perspective of a ministry-centred contextualisation of the Christian gospel and cultural engagement, pluralism may be treated as a challenge to overcome.[392] This resonates with the idolatry narrative in Strange, Turnau, and to some extent in Keller. Keller refers to sin and, more specifically, idolatry, as the problem to be tackled in cultural engagement.[393] However, even here, Keller is clear that the outworking of idolatry in any person and any cultural context is complex, and therefore requires a variety of approaches in cultural engagement.[394] This variety of approaches involves the contextualisation of the Christian gospel in whichever cultural context is presenting at the time rather than adopting one model.[395] Pluralism as described by Chaplin is not restricted to religious pluralism but traces its lineage back to Kuyper's sphere sovereignty; hence the term *institutional* pluralism. Call it multiformity, complexity, diversity, or pluralism: it is the foundation of cultural development and therefore integral to Christian cultural engagement.

Keller's complex theological cultural contextualisation also sheds some light on the purposes of God in society with regard to common grace. Along with the

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[391] Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 23.

[392] For example, with reference to religious pluralism, Carson notes that because "the world has become *more* furiously religious" Christians must rethink the relationship between "Christ and culture". Carson, *Christ and Culture*, 7.

[393]He writes, "The root of every sin is idolatry, and idolatry is a failure to look to Jesus for our salvation and justification." Keller, *Center Church*, 71.

[394] In considering the speeches of Paul to the Athenians in the Book of Acts, Keller describes how he adapted his message to suit the idolatrous themes of the cultural context he was confronting: "The Scriptures show numerous instances when gospel truths are brought out in different orders, argued for using different premises, and applied to hearts in distinctive ways...And yet, while these gospel truths are never expressed in the same way to all, it is clear they have the same content." Keller, *Center Church*, 114..

[395] The models he refers to are the "countercultural" model, the "relevance" model, the "Two Kingdoms" model, and the "transformationist" model. Kuyperianism falls under the title of "transformationist" here. Keller, *Center Church*, 239-240.

presence of idolatry in cultural engagement Keller also assumes the working of God's common grace which allows Christians to affirm the beliefs of a cultural community in the first stage of contextualisation.[396] For example, there may be certain elements within society that indicate a favourable disposition to the Christian gospel, such as the family, community, and justice.[397] However, Keller's presupposition of the existence and activity of God's common grace moves beyond the elements of cultural formation in the belief system of a culture to the actual process of cultural development being a direct fulfilment of the cultural mandate.[398] This conviction resonates with Mouw's neo-Kuyperian exposition of the whole of humanity contributing to the cultural purposes of creation. Keller's application of common grace to contextualisation provides a more holistic frame of reference that supports institutional pluralism: it takes cultural engagement a step further from the contextualised gospel preaching of Paul in the book of Acts in its affirmation that "the City is an intrinsically positive social form with a checkered past and a beautiful future."[399] Crucially, an understanding of institutional pluralism, and an application of common grace to ministry-centred contextualisation provide Christian cultural engagement with the multiple perspectives required to approach the complex cultural "other".

3.3.5 Contextualisation and theological faithfulness

Theologically, cultural engagement in the neo-Calvinist tradition produces its own internal complexity that must be taken into account in any kind of contextualisation. For example, holding positions on both an antithetical relationship between different groups of human beings, and an acceptance of commonality between all humanity can appear to be an impossible

[396] In his "common grace" God grants "wisdom and witness to the truth" to cultures. Keller writes: "To enter a culture, [a] main task is to discern its dominant worldviews or belief systems, because contextualized gospel ministry should affirm the beliefs of the culture wherever it can be done with integrity." Keller, *Center Church*, 123.

[397] These elements provide points of contact and connection for the Christian faith: "A culture that puts a high value on family relationships and community should be shown that there is a strong biblical basis for the family. A culture that puts a high value on individual human rights and justice should be shown how the biblical doctrine of the image of God is the historical and logical foundation for human rights." Keller, *Center Church*, 124.

[398] Cultural development is evidenced in technology, in art, in architecture, in all kinds of production. For Keller, this is why the city is so important for mission and cultural engagement, because cities are the centres of production. Keller, *Center Church*, 150-151.

[399] Keller, *Center Church*, 151.

contradiction.[400] The crux of common grace hinges upon whether the idea of "saving grace" is the only category which may define God's dealings with humanity, and whether there are other ways of describing God's attitude to human beings who may, in terms of salvation, stand in an antithetical relationship to him.[401] Mouw writes, "What is important for Kuyper's account, though, is that the fact of our fallenness does not in any way diminish either the reality or the importance of cultural formation."[402] On this reading, it should be possible to remain theologically faithful to foundational Reformed doctrines at the same time as engaging fully with a pluralist society in such a way as upholds freedom of conscience, equality, public justice, and cultural complexity.

An illustration of the above appears in Mouw's short but profound theological reflection on the city of Las Vegas.[403] His comparison between Las Vegas and the New Jerusalem highlights the difference made to cultural formation by the existence of sin in the world, a difference which creates "two very different patterns of cultural formation in the world: cultural disobedience as well as cultural obedience."[404] Yet he affirms Kuyper's strong belief that even this disobedient expression of cultural formation has not "irreparably damaged the good creation," which paves the way for the idea of cultural transformation.[405] In this sense the antithesis is not the final word regarding theological cultural dialogue.[406] Here is where the doctrine of common grace becomes that which

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[400] Mouw addresses this apparent paradox when he asks, "How do we take with utmost seriousness the need to be clear about the lines between belief and unbelief, between those who live within the boundaries of saving grace and those who do not, while at the same time maintaining an openness to - even an active appreciation for - all that is good and beautiful and true that takes place outside of those boundaries?" Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 33.

[401] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 33.

[402] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 8.

[403] In "The Spiritual Significance of Las Vegas," Mouw writes that "Las Vegas is fair game for theological critique" but "also an interesting topic for calmer theological reflection" which he develops into an allegory between the casino city and the Biblical image of the New Jerusalem; the heavenly city described in Revelation 21. He describes how Las Vegas promises to satisfy the longing and yearning of the human soul for security and everlasting beauty, and yet fails to deliver: "Las Vegas is a counterfeit version of the New Jerusalem. And it shares something of the glorious reality that it mocks." He concludes by reminding his readers that the "glitzy culture" of Las Vegas presents a mirage that "does not quiet the profound restlessness of our hearts." Richard J. Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn From Popular Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 20-22.

[404] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 8.

[405] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 11.

[406] He writes: "[Kuyper] knew that it was one thing to affirm the reality of the antithesis, and another thing simply to reject all that issues forth from the lives of sinful people." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 63.

holds the antithesis in check, and vice versa.[407] This is one example of how a contextualisation of Reformed doctrines can contribute to Christian cultural engagement but does it advance a *renewed* approach to the complex cultural "other"? In the words of Richard Mouw: "What do the Canons of Dordt mean for people who hang around the Las Vegas airport?"[408] I suggest that an application of these doctrines to the area of social justice may provide an answer.

3.3.6 The problem of sin

Christian sociologist Elaine Storkey has undertaken extensive research into gender-based violence as well as presenting a case for Christian feminism. She comments that while feminist theories attack the presuppositions of sociobiological and evolutionary psychological theories in gender based violence, thereby providing a fuller picture of the narrative of power and patriarchy behind them, no theory adequately answers the "why" question, or suggests how this narrative can truly change.[409] Christianity is not exempt from patriarchy, misogyny or gender based violence, something which post-Christian feminists have highlighted.[410] However, if the greater belief is in a divine being who cares about justice and compassion then the question remains, why does gender violence persist even amongst Christians?[411] Here is where Storkey uses the concept of the antithesis without labelling it as such; instead, she uses the biblical word for it: sin. Sin is the failure to live up to what we were created

[407] Remaining consistent with Calvinist theology, the very fact that the antithesis exists demonstrates the existence of something else in relationship with it: "So, while Kuyper continued to teach the antithesis, he also recognized the need to hold it in tension with a theological concept that allowed for the positive contributions of unregenerate humankind: *common grace*." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 63, 71.

[408] Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, 15.

[409] Power and patriarchy attacks personhood across all cultural communities and religions. Where male power is intricately bound up in social narratives gender bias, oppression, and violence will continue. Storkey leaves the issue of religion to the end of her book, beginning first with a sensitive handling of the complex and varied attitudes towards women in Islam and then moving on to Christianity. See e.g. Storkey, 185, 187, and 189.

[410] Their argument being that Christianity has constructed a patriarchal worldview and is gender-biased when it comes to interpreting reality and meaning. See e.g., Storkey, *Scars*, 206.

[411] Storkey raises the questions of whether Christianity houses an authoritarian theology, or whether it has been culturally influenced by patriarchal influences. Another argument is that the Bible affirms violence towards women but Storkey explains the context of these traumatic events in biblical history, suggesting that a description of violence does not equate to approval. Even the New Testament allusions to patriarchy in the early church must be read in their cultural contexts. Storkey, *Scars*, 211, 214.

for and manifests itself any action that does not stem from love.[412] Storkey writes:

> At a far deeper level than either 'biology' or 'culture,' then, 'sin' helps us to explain the ubiquity of violence against women. We are responsible. Patriarchal structures are a product of human choice and attitudes; oppression and brutality are rooted in the power sin exercises in human communities. A Christian theology of sin places accountability for attitudes, culture and actions firmly on human shoulders; we have to own what we create.[413]

Nevertheless, unlike evolutionary theory and sociobiology which offers no hope of moral change, a Christian theology of sin gives way to "a theology of redemption."[414] Together both a theology of sin and a theology of redemption provides a way of understanding why gender-based violence occurs, as well as how it may be overcome. Although the source of these is located in Christianity, Storkey is clear that only the united efforts of many diverse groups in societies and globally will bring about the "healing and the work of restorative justice" needed to overcome violence against women.[415] Here is an example of the fruit of a Christian cultural engagement that has Reformed doctrines imbedded within its worldview, doctrines that lead to an active and theological concern for the complex cultural "other". Theological faithfulness looks like more than an idolatry narrative, or a ministry-centred contextualisation of the Christian gospel, although these have their place according to their individual spheres: theological faithfulness also looks like social justice.

3.3.7 Justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility

One of the key contributions of Nicholas Wolterstorff to neo-Calvinism has been in the area of justice, and his references to Kuyper's concern for the poor are particularly striking. He refers to Kuyper's idea of "social reform" over and above

[412] The scope of such sin is universal and pervades all relationships, all cultural communities, and all races. Storkey, *Scars*, 218-219.

[413] Storkey, *Scars*, 219.

[414] Not only is there hope in the attitude and actions of Jesus Christ towards women, but also in the many organisations and groups working to bring hope and restoration and cultural change in place of violence against women. Storkey, *Scars*, 220-222.

[415] The effort must cross ecumenical, religious, ethnic, social, and cultural barriers if atrocities against women are to be stopped. Storkey, *Scars*, 222-223.

charity as a way of alleviating poverty because poverty jeopardises the working of the organism of society in which humanity should flourish.[416] Furthermore, alleviating poverty in society, and globally, is a matter of justice; justice in terms of the rights of every human being to "sustenance," and the political, economic, and cultural structures that perpetuate poverty and deny those rights to the poor.[417] In order for this kind of transformation to occur justice and compassion for the poor needs to become embedded in Christian spirituality; the "inward" life must fuel the outward action, not just for Christian academics but for all who follow Christ.[418] Wolterstorff's emphasis on Kuyper's commitment to social justice echoes the radical language of the Confession of Belhar in which justice overcomes racial inequality, mercy trumps enmity, hospitality replaces irreconciliation, and humility speaks truth to unjust political power structures. Christian cultural engagement which seeks to be theological faithful must embody these same traits of justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility.

In writing about what the "social forms" of the future might look like as human cultural development moves ahead, Neo-Calvinist theologian and Afro-American professor at Wheaton College, Vincent Bacote comments that "there should be certain common characteristics among all attempts to be responsible stewards of creation."[419] He suggests characteristics of "service and nurture", "justice", "humility" and "a zeal for creative development."[420] While not precisely the same traits I propose above, this demonstrates a neo-Calvinist, and a neo-Kuyperian commitment to social engagement that upholds diversity, complexity, freedom, and equality alongside faithfulness to a Reformed worldview. Bacote

[416] Wolterstorff draws a comparison between Kuyper and Marx in that both acknowledged the class struggle in the social problems of poverty, and the damage caused by capitalism to the poorest in society, but Kuyper's motivation stemmed from his Calvinism, rather than from socialism. See e.g., Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publidhing Co., 1987), 80.

[417] Wolterstorff speaks of "shalom" which is an all-encompassing peace, and which holds no room for injustice and poverty. Christians particularly have a responsibility in this because, in Wolterstorff's words, "In God's kingdom of shalom there are no poor and there is no tyranny." Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 97.

[418] Wolterstorff addresses the relationship between liturgy in Christian worship and the life of the Christian in the world, raising the question that liturgy is worthwhile in and of itself not because it serves how Christians act in society, but because it "authenticates" it. In the same way, when Christians act in compassion and mercy in the world their actions authenticate their liturgy. The two are intimately connected. See e.g., Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 148, 151, 156.

[419] Bacote, *The Spirit*, 146.

[420] He also refers to Mouw's "posture of humility" in terms of common grace activities for the sake of cultural renewal. Bacote, *The Spirit*, 146-147.

is a self-conscious *neo*-Kuyperian, in the business of updating Kuyper. He believes that "we need to hold on to the good ideas in Kuyper...while at the same time doing a "neo" job on some bad ones."[421] Here he is specifically referring to Kuyper's historically contextual racial prejudices.[422] His comments regarding Kuyper's racism are acute: he remarks that "with Kuyper I needed a double view: I wanted to say something positive about common grace and public action, but I couldn't pretend and say those other things were not there. I have to tell the truth about both parts."[423] Speaking truthfully about Kuyper's racism is an example of adopting the characteristics of humility, hospitality, justice, and mercy as a way of remaining theologically faithful, for the sake of the complex cultural, and historically marginalized "other".

3.3.8 Kuyper and Belhar

In the previous chapter I described the influence of Kuyper's theology on the Dutch Reformed Church's justification for apartheid, along with natural theology, Fichtean Romanticism, and a particular missiological model.[424] All these influences led the church to a fundamental belief in the irreconcilability of different cultural and racial groups of human beings.[425] Botman explains that there had been a growing acceptance of the dialectical theology of Karl Barth which had formed much of the doctrinal basis of the Declaration of Barmen in Nazi Germany in 1934; however, this was rejected in favour of a Kuyperian-influenced theological justification of apartheid in 1974.[426] The Confession of Belhar, formulated in 1986, is a statement on visible unity between all peoples of all backgrounds, rejecting separation on the basis of natural diversity: it is

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[421] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 81.

[422] See e.g., Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 81-82.

[423] Vincent Bacote, "Critical thinking is obeying the commandment of loving your neighbour as yourself," Theologische Universiteit Kampen, accessed August 01, 2019, https://en.tukampen.nl/news-english-website/vincent-bacote-critical-thinking-is-obeying-the-commandment-of-loving-your-neiii.

[424] Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 348.

[425] Referring to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, this theology of natural diversity was taken to be biblical and therefore in accordance with God's will. See e.g., Russel H. Botman, "From Barmen to Belhar: A contemporary confessing journey," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 47, no. 1&2 (2006): http://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/index.php/ngtt/article/view/1191/1654.

[426] The Barmen Declaration was specific to its time and concentrated its doctrinal language on rejecting Nazi ideology and calling the Christian church to return to God's revelation about himself contained in Scripture. Botman explains that the Belhar Confessions grew out of apartheid and addresses the sin of racism. However, both the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar Confession are Christological in their formulations. Botman, "From Barmen to Belhar."

also a statement on economic justice. Botman writes: “In a world of enmity, a world of the powerful over against the powerless and where the privileged seek selfishly their own interest and control over others, the Word of God calls us to revisit our discipleship in light of the challenges of the global economy.”[427] As stated in the previous chapter, Kuyper *was* committed to the plight of the poor and economic injustice; he was also committed to the “equality of brotherhood.”[428] It is these Kuyperian characteristics that, as Wolterstorff rightly emphasises, must be reclaimed.

Paragraph Four of the Belhar Confession states that “We believe… that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.”[429] Speaking biblical truth to structures of power to challenge global economic injustice is a contextualisation of Kuyper’s social justice in practice. It extends the horizon of Christian cultural engagement beyond questions about which films to watch or discerning the idolatry narrative in a Japanese toilet: it seeks to make known the God who reveals himself in the characteristics of humility, justice, mercy, and hospitality. It prioritises the “other”. If Kuyperian social justice is to be a major feature of Christian cultural engagement then it must extend to all areas of relationships, including between the sexes. An example of this may be found in Elaine Storkey’s research into injustice towards women, both in her efforts to establish a Christian feminism and in to highlight widespread gender-based violence. Storkey’s Christian sociology demonstrates how Christian cultural engagement must move beyond how to interpret cultural phenomena for personal discipleship: it is a practical application of neo-Calvinist ideas that brings Reformed theology to the coal face of cultural engagement in a way which affects the lives of disadvantaged and abused women and which speaks truth to power.

3.3.9 Contemporary neo-Calvinism and feminism

Kuyper’s dim view of feminism was discussed in Chapter One. Over a century later, neo-Calvinism is beginning to acknowledge the shortcomings in this

[427] Botman, “From Barmen to Belhar.”

[428] This, according to Kuyper, is an extension of the compassion and ministry of Christ entrusted to the church: “to influence society through the ministry of the Word, the ministry of charity, and the institution of the equality of brotherhood.” Bacote, *The Spirit*, 71.

[429] “The Confession of Belhar.”

perspective, not least in the awarding of the Kuyper prize to a Christian feminist.[430] In her book, *What's Right With Feminism*, Storkey outlines the arguments from a feminist perspective in the areas of work, motherhood, professionalism, education, the legal system, and the church, and then follows these arguments with an analysis of three feminist approaches: liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, and radical feminism. At the end of each analysis Storkey poses concerns and questions both from a sociological point of view and a Christian perspective.[431] Here is where careful contextualisation is vital: religion is viewed as a tool of oppression.[432]

What is most relevant for this thesis is Storkey's treatment of "a biblically Christian feminism which reaches out beyond the institutional Church into all areas of life."[433] Storkey's vision for Christian feminism is concurrent with the Kuyperian pursuit of cultural renewal; Christian feminism is simply another perspective on how all humans, whatever their gender, may flourish in society. The concern is for justice and equality, where women are truly free without patriarchal coercion and domination. For non-Christian forms of feminism this freedom is from any reference to God.[434] However, a biblical worldview acknowledges that human autonomy is at the heart of oppression, and the true freedom that comes through the Christian belief in forgiveness of sins provides

[430] Two reasons for including Storkey in this literature review are as follows. Firstly, she received the 2016 Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life. Secondly, Storkey's work involves research, dialogue, and campaigning about disadvantaged women and gender equality on an international stage. For all its emphasis on cultural diversity and theological generosity, the headlining personalities of contemporary neo-Calvinism are, in the main, male. This is a significant drawback in a movement that seeks cultural, social, and political theological engagement in a contemporary context.

[431] Storkey begins with a counterargument from within the particular feminist approach, e.g. that the Marxist regimes we have seen across the 20th century in fact have not been good news for women's rights, and follows this up with a recognition that each approach, although legitimate in raising concerns, is beginning with the wrong basis for correcting society. Elaine Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism* (1985; London: SPCK, 1990), 88.

[432]Storkey addresses the issues of polarization between Christianity and feminism, as well as the softening in the attitudes of some sectors of the Church to the feminist cause and looks at a "post-Christian feminism" which takes spiritual ideas about God and makes them female-centric. Salvation remains but it is not through Christ – because this perpetuates sinful, patriarchal oppression – but through feminism itself; "God" becomes a way of being fully woman. Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, 126-127.

[433] She approaches this from history and from Scripture, and then asks, "If we are to espouse a consciously Christian feminism today what should its concerns be?" Storkey, *What's Right With Femnism*, 131.

[434] Storkey traces liberal, Marxist, and radical feminism back to the emergence of the Enlightenment attitudes towards nature and freedom; for feminism this means "woman unshackled: woman *with no higher authority*." Storkey, *What's Right with Feminism*, 133-136.

a stronger foundation for pursuing equality and justice.[435] With an emphasis on the Reformed doctrine of justification for both men and women equally through grace alone, Storkey presents a historical argument for Christian feminists in the areas of slavery, temperance, and prostitution.[436] This tradition, she argues, is what Christian feminists should compare themselves with: "Humility, love, compassion, concern for those weak and oppressed, and a willingness to suffer, is a difficult agenda to take on board."[437] These characteristics are similar to those I have suggested need to be at the heart of all kinds of contextualised Christian cultural engagement. They reflect the Christology of the Belhar Confession and place the Christian good of "the other" at the heart of cultural engagement.[438]

Storkey's work demonstrates how a Kuyperian worldview may be contextualised in Christian cultural engagement. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, Storkey presents arguments for equality in creation, for the disruption to that equality in the fall, and the restoration of relationships between men and women in redemption, the fullest evidence for which can be seen in the earthly life of Christ and his attitude towards women.[439] While the structural and societal injustices and oppression that are attributable to men are recognised by Christian and non-Christian feminists alike, the root of the approaches taken by both is different. For the Christian feminists, because of redemption, "change," "reconciliation," and "repentance" are all possible.[440] Such deep change will produce liberation not just for women but for men also: forgiveness is powerful

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[435] Storkey writes that "the biblical message that we are sinful is the only one which can account for the account for the situations we experience around us. Depravity is real enough: we are slaves to ourselves and will enslave whichever others we can put under our power." Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, 137.

[436] The concern of Christian women in these areas was for justice for the weak, vulnerable, and poor. Powerfully, Storkey describes them as women who "were prepared to identify with the abused and discarded in society, in a way which simply followed the footsteps of Christ himself." Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, 149.

[437] Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, 149.

[438] For example, Storkey's characteristics resonate strongly with the belief "that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others." "The Confession of Belhar."

[439] Creation, fall, and redemption are typical Reformed themes, as evidenced in Carson's biblical theology. These themes point to the freedom that is possible through Christ's works: "There is evidence here then of the new dynamic that comes for women when we recognize that in Christ sin is conquered and a new freedom is possible." Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism*, 153, 156.

[440] This picks up on the theme of freedom that comes through the forgiveness of sins. Redemption deals with oppression and injustice at an intrinsically personal level, not merely at a structural or societal level. Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism,* 163.

and “brings restoration and healing.”[441] The difference lies in this biblical worldview, which is at the heart of neo-Calvinism, and encompasses special and common grace, and the antithesis. Storkey writes: “For injustice to women is not rooted in one sphere but is present in every area of life: sexual, historical, linguistic, social, economic, legal, aesthetic and ecclesiastical.”[442] The task of Christian feminism, then, is extensive and will endeavour to effect all areas of society.[443] This commitment to cultural and social transformation in the cause of Christian feminism illustrates the effectiveness of contextualising neo-Calvinist themes in this area of cultural engagement and demonstrates how contextualisation and faithfulness together contribute to a renewed approach to the complex, cultural other.

3.4 Creation, Cultural Renewal, and “the Other”

This thesis is concerned with renewing Christian cultural engagement through taking into consideration cultural complexity, particularly as it pertains to “the other”. Commonness, dialogue, Reformed themes of creation, fall, and redemption, Christological imperatives for public justice, mercy, humility, and hospitality, form the theological foundation for such a renewal. It is an approach which recognises the dignity of the complex cultural “other” reflected profoundly in the contextualisation of neo-Calvinism, and in a pursuit of cultural renewal. This section will consider the relationship between creation, cultural renewal, and the complex, cultural other as the third crucial aspect to a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement. While this section will touch on eschatological themes, cultural renewal is to be a present and ongoing project. To this end I will begin by demonstrating how an updating of Kuyperian ideas is necessary for cultural renewal in South Africa. Kuyperian sphere sovereignty has run through this chapter, either implicitly in the form of context-based

[441] Like the historical Christian feminists, identifying with Christ is the key. Storkey, *What’s Right With Feminism,* 165.

[442] Storkey, *What’s Right With Feminism,* 176. Christian feminism needs to work hard at understanding what following Christ looks like in all of these areas.

[443] This is the task of challenging Enlightenment attitudes towards what it means to be human and instead discerning “how women are to be treated in God’s terms and to move our society from being one which debases and devalues them to one in which they have dignity, equality, and freedom to be really human.” Storkey, *What’s Right With Feminism,* 178. It is important to note that Storkey never implies that women and men are the same. She upholds some differences between male and female but clearly these are not to be used as tools of oppression.

engagement, or explicitly with references to institutional pluralism and the irreducible identities of social spheres. However, as stated in the previous chapter, any discussion of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty must be fully tempered with a Kuyperian call to social justice, to prevent this doctrine of organic interdependence to degenerate into a doctrine of "separateness" that allows segregation, coercion, exploitation, and domination of the cultural other.[444] This tempering provides Christian cultural engagement with the power to expose and challenge institutionalised cultural injustice wherever it is found, as part of pursuing cultural renewal.

3.4.1 Cultural engagement must denounce institutional separateness

From its beginnings in the South African Dutch Reformed Church, apartheid was theologically justified through the belief that separation by skin colour was necessary for the flourishing of both black and white Christians.[445] Botman writes: "Difference was and, unfortunately, still is seen as the historical problem, separateness as the guiding value orientation, and apartheid and segregated churches as the justifiable structural solutions."[446] Crucially, although apartheid as a spiritual issue found a home in Kuyper's creation theology and the Babel story in Genesis 11, Botman is clear that their understanding was incomplete and askew.[447] Kuyper's Christology turns Babel disunity into redeemed unity, therefore equality and unity between races should be evident in churches.[448] Does this mean that there is some hope for a type of Kuyperian cultural engagement in the context of post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa? Botman wisely counsels that Kuyper's core value of "separateness" remains; it

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[444] Botman comments that "separateness" is a theological concept that can take the church "captive" when it becomes a desirability choice. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 348-349.

[445] It began through the "weakness" of some white Dutch Reformed Christians being unable to take Holy Communion alongside people of colour. This "weakness" became the grounds for separation. The belief was that this separateness promoted the work of the kingdom, therefore separate services were imposed, followed by an entirely separate church denomination for people of colour: the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1887. See e.g., Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 350.

[446] Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 351.

[447] Kuyper is indicted rightly. Botman describes him as having a filter of separateness that was anti-African and pro-white European. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 355.

[448] Kuyper's emphasis on pluriformity was as "a passing phase in historical development." In addition, there was room for equality for black South Africans in his counsel to his fellow Dutchmen from the Transvaal. Botman explains that these things, and the full scope of Kuyperian thinking was hidden from the Dutch Reformed Church. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 353-354.

is peculiarly Dutch, but it has influenced Reformed theology beyond South Africa.[449] Botman writes: "Despite the attempts to come to a black Reformed usage of Kuyper in South Africa, I am led to conclude that, in Kuyper's legacy, blood turned out to be thicker than justice."[450] However, this does not mean that Kuyper cannot be recontextualized: it means that this recontextualization is complicated and requires critical perspicuity at every turn.[451] For example, sphere sovereignty may now be unusable in such a context, but, as explained previously, Kuyper has also influenced the anti-apartheid movement. Challenging institutional separateness and other kinds of injustice must now be an ecumenical, Christological, and distinctly African project.[452]

3.4.2 A call for cultural renewal and global economic justice

Botman writes that in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa there is a new evil that has replaced apartheid: "the forces of global exclusion" that have replaced "a racial problem with a dominant class issue."[453] Here is where Kuyper can prove a theological ally for the South African, and global economic context: not only is "Mammonization" a rejection of the one true God, but it is also a rejection "of God's providence over all God's people."[454] It is an issue of social and economic justice, and any new attempt at contextualizing Reformed theology must make this the priority. Kuyper himself did not advocate imitating what has gone before; rather the contextual call is to return to the origins "of the Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the time to come."[455] The above quote in context suggests that our current "actual life" calls for global economic justice, along with continued racial and gender equality, in the pursuit of cultural renewal.

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[449] The core value of separateness "is a serious theological question that should no be confined to South Africa. It is a transnational responsibility." Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 358.

[450] Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 358.

[451] Botman explains that for post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa, those who wish to recontextualize Reformed theology "have to be clear about their intentions." Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 359.

[452] Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 359.

[453] This is as a result of neo-liberal economic policies which have created economic inequality. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 360.

[454] Botman refers to Kuyper's sermon on Matthew 6:24 in which he addresses the power of Mammon to deceive and devour. Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 361.

[455] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130. Quoted in Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 361.

3.4.3 A call for cultural transformation for gender justice

A further example is found in Storkey's research into gender-based violence. In her book, *Scars Across Humanity*, Storkey addresses a pursuit of cultural renewal in her attempt to both understand the mindset and structural attitudes behind atrocities towards women in different types of societies, and posit some solutions for overcoming such evil. Storkey outlines the seriousness of the subject in the opening pages:

> The truth is that violence on such a scale could not exist were it not structured in some way into the very fabric of societies and cultures themselves. It could not continue if it were not somehow supported by deep assumptions about the value of women, or some justification of the use of power. In many cultures such assumptions are reiterated every day in the absence of legal protection for women, or indifferent towards issues of human rights. Even in advanced democratic societies, where women play a significant part in public life, the level of domestic violence and sexual abuse suggests that these assumptions remain powerful and effective, even though they are concealed behind closed doors.[456]

It is vital that theological cultural engagement that is based upon a theological movement seeking cultural transformation for the common good moves beyond the world of theory and speculation and out into the gritty world of cultural and societal evil. It is yet another demonstration that Christian cultural engagement must speak truth to power.

Cultural transformation is what is needed in order for all forms of gender-based violence to cease: for example, at the end of her chapter on forced and early marriage Storkey explains that "deep attitudinal changes are necessary."[457] The scope of gender inequality, oppression, and violence against women crosses cultural and religious boundaries.[458] Storkey makes the point that "laws take place within prior cultural frameworks" which suggests that even legal

[456] Elaine Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women* (London: Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015), 2.

[457] Storkey, *Scars*, 58.

[458] For example, in her chapter on honour killings, Storkey writes that within certain cultural communities, for instance in Pakistan, it is often the cultural attitudes which exempt the perpetrators of what other societies would deem as murderous acts. But the patriarchy that lies behind those acts runs throughout every society, even in European nations where honour killings are treated as murder. In this case, the patriarchy manifests itself as a fear of being labelled racist which keeps women enslaved in vulnerable, and often undetected situations. See e.g., Storkey, *Scars*, 71.

safeguards need to be deconstructed to ensure they do not work against the female victim.[459] In pursuing why gender based violence occurs Storkey outlines arguments from sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, as well as functionalism and family conflict theories from her own sociological background, but concludes that all of these theories are found wanting.[460] While sociobiology and evolutionary psychology theories are plausible, they cannot be empirically substantiated, and sociological theories are based on behavioural studies which may or may not be corrupted with normalised misogynist attitudes.[461] However, just as global economic injustice, racism, and sexism do not have the last word, neither do abortion and female infanticide, female genital mutilation, honour killings, trafficking and prostitution, rape, and sexual violence and war. Hope lies in true personal, moral, and cultural transformation.[462]

3.4.4 Cultural renewal, creation, common and special grace

Underpinning a hope for personal, moral, and cultural transformation is the relationship between cultural renewal, creation, and common and special grace. According to Mouw, not only is God glorified by the whole of creation, non-human and human, but he also delights in "various *human* states of affairs, even when they are displayed in the lives of non-elect human beings."[463] In fact,

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[459] This is in the context of violence in the home. The empowerment of women victims of intimate partner violence can help, but empowerment needs to be in the context of laws which actually safeguard the victim, otherwise such empowerment is misleading. Storkey, *Scars*, 91.

[460] An important point that she makes as a sociologist is that "human beings do not just behave, they *act*." Storkey, *Scars*, 171. This is in contrast to the arguments from sociobiology and evolutionary psychology that at their extreme justify acts of violence from a perspective of need and survival. See e.g., Storkey, *Scars*, 157, 160-161.

[461] Plausibility here is based on the assumption that men and women have different sexual needs in order to survive. It is therefore plausible that if a man needs to have as many sexual partners as possible to keep his seed alive then rape may be an effective way of achieving this within a theoretical framework. However, given the damage and trauma experienced by rape survivors, and given that not all women who are raped survive if it has been particularly brutal, this is impossible to substantiate empirically. See e.g. Storkey, *Scars,* 160.

[462] This is no mere exercise in religious dominance by the back-door. As a sociologist Storkey lays out the ways in which members of society can work together to bring about change. For example, at the end of her chapter on abortion she writes that the key to changing deep-seated cultural attitudes towards women as socially dispensable is to accept them as equals. There is no suggestion that only the institutional church can do this, but that everyone in a society has the responsibility for campaigning, empowering women, and pulling resources to effect this change: "The challenge is for civil society, educators, faith leaders, media, churches and legislators to join in developing and implementing a greater vision of equality. Only when girls are valued and cherished, across the whole culture, does violence against women at the very beginning of life stand any chance of being eradicated." Storkey, *Scars*, 28.

[463] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 35.

Mouw pushes Calvinist thought to the extreme with his conviction not only that God delights in those human affairs as good in themselves, but that God may also morally approve of human action even when that human being is "unsaved."[464] Moreover, it is the work of God within the heart and actions of that "unsaved" human being that produces good and positive actions, a power which Kuyper attributes to the Holy Spirit.[465] It is God's power, God's favourable disposition, and God's empathy with all of humanity, which Calvin recognised as a "peculiar grace," that is explained by the idea of "common grace" in the Reformed tradition.[466] These complex interactions give value and meaning to cultural works by both Christian and non-Christian individuals and cultural groups.

3.4.5 Redemptive transformation as a way of life

For Keller, common grace functions within the life of the institutional church, thereby creating strong relationships between the spheres within which believers operate. Mouw praises the work of Redeemer Presbyterian church in addressing the "disconnect" often felt by Christians involved in the arts when they attend church.[467] Reminiscent of a neo-Kuyperian approach which seeks to equip lay Christians to view theological cultural engagement as a way of life, rather than something that is separate from their personal faith, this is a dynamic example of the concepts of "special grace" (as expressed in institutional sacraments, liturgy and canons) and "common grace" (an attitude of divine favour to creation) working in harmony. Caught up in this is a belief that human cultural development culminates in one final act of redemptive transformation; the gathering in of cultural works in a final harvest.[468]

Common grace in cultural renewal is not a static, one-dimensional concept. Common grace appears to have at least two functions: firstly, to reveal the multiple purposes of God in creation, and secondly, to fulfil them. Mouw writes,

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[464] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 36-39.
[465] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 44.
[466] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 29.
[467] Mouw writes: "For a major congregation not only to give its blessing to the arts as an important arena for Christian service, but actually to convene artists to wrestle with the detailed challenges they face in pursuing their vocation - this (along with parallel Redeemer programs for persons in the financial services) is a wonderful outreach into the larger culture." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 102.
[468] Keller, *Center Church*, 151.

"Alongside God's clear concern about the eternal destiny of individuals are his designs for the larger creation," in which "the fruits of humankind's cultural labors" will play a significant role.[469] This relates back to the Kuyperian belief that creation is infused with cultural potential and develops it to demonstrate that cultural potential has a purpose in and of itself. This cultural potential of humanity, the power to achieve it, and its ultimate fulfilment, are dependent upon God's common grace which is always at work through God's Spirit, moving through creation with dynamism and creativity.[470] This relies upon a belief in the goodness and provision of the Creator for his creation.[471] It also relies upon a belief in a glorious purpose and goal for the diversity of cultural formation in all its fullness which encompasses the cultural works of *all* humanity sanctified and prepared by the Holy Spirit.[472] Cultural works of all human beings are given value and meaning through this positive view of creation and of human cultural development. This is dependent upon a reformational worldview.

3.4.6 Returning to the reformational worldview

A presupposition for a reformational worldview is that creation needs developing; humans are required to build civilizations and to cultivate what God has created.[473] Creation is full of definable possibilities which reveal "the marvellous wisdom of God in creation and the profound meaningfulness of our task in the world."[474] This is vital in understanding the relationship between creation, salvation, and sin: the creational and cultural development are not afterthoughts of God, and neither did his plans for them only come into being after the Fall. The "cultural mandate" continues to apply to all of humanity.[475]

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[469] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 50.

[470] It is a Reformed theological concept that is inextricably bound to human cultural development, and one which is still open to exploration. It may even transpire that there is a salvific element to this dynamic grace, a speculation which Mouw raises about the unknown scope of common grace. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 100.

[471] In Mouw's words, "God cares about the whole of creation." Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, 78.

[472] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 89. With regard to Kuyper's interpretation of this theology he writes, "Here, for example, is what I consider to be a profound theological comment: "the work of the Holy Spirit," Kuyper writes, "consists in leading all creation *to its destiny*, the final purpose of which is the glory of God."" Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 88.

[473] Wolters sees the development of creation throughout human history as the fulfilment of the creation mandate. He calls this the "creation mandate" in contrast to the "cultural mandate" referred to by Schilder in the previous chapter. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 43.

[474] That task is one of participation for humans. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 44.

[475] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 44-46.

The meaningfulness of cultivating creation is vindicated finally in an act of creation renewal, as Keller states above.[476] There is continuity between the cultural development of this creation and the riches of the new creation, which gives value to *all* cultural works.[477] This is because human cultural or creational activity is governed by common grace which restricts the full consequences of the Fall: "Through God's goodness to all men and women, believers and unbelievers alike, God's faithfulness to creation still bears fruit in humankind's personal, societal, and cultural lives."[478] This is the essence of a reformational worldview and is vital for a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement which seeks to uphold the cultural life of "the other".

3.4.7 What about sin?

Affirming the meaningfulness of human cultural works regardless of whether they are carried out by Christians or non-Christians, seems to run against Reformed theology, even though Wolters explains that it depends on whether these cultural works are in line with God's original intentions or not. One of his most helpful distinctions is between the idea of "the world" as "perverted creation" rather than referring to everything that exists outside of the church. On this reading, "the world" refers to a sinful motivation or inclination to pervert God's original intentions for creation rather than a second realm – the secular realm – to which the life of faith – the sacred realm – has no relation. Wolters explains how dangerous this thinking is because it ultimately condemns everything outside of the "sacred" realm and leaves it to rot, while refusing to

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[476] He writes: "There is no reason to believe that the cultural dimensions of earthly reality (except insofar as they are involved in sin) will be absent from the new, glorified earth that is promised. In fact, the biblical indications point in the opposite direction." Wolters explains that even the passage that is often used as evidence for annihilation in fact supports the neo-Calvinist view. 2 Peter 3:10 speaks of the burning up of the elements but that this is a reference to the purification of the heavens and the earth resulting in a renewed creation. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 47. This view is supported by biblical scholar and ethicist Jonathan Moo, who refers to Wolters in his treatment of the same passage. Moo is keen to emphasise a clear distinction between the presence of sin in the old creation and the absence of sin in the new creation, but he affirms a continuity of creation between the two. Johnathan Moo, "Environmental unsustainability and a biblical vision of the earth's future," in *Creation in Crisis*, ed. Robert S. White (London: SPCK, 2009), 264-266.

[477] Cultural activity either has a tendency to move away from God, or towards him. Wolters differentiates between two different types of direction, not two different types of people. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 59.

[478] Wolters distinguishes between common and special grace here by explaining that one restrains sin (common) and the other atones for it (special). The point about common grace is that God's original intention for creation cannot be thwarted by sin even when human cultural activity tends away from it. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 60-61.

acknowledge the ways in which sin affects the life of faith and church.[479] This attitude undermines the totality aspect of sin which in turn undermines the totality aspect of redemption: scripturally, the only irreversible remedy for "the world" is redemption through Jesus Christ. His work restores the totality of creation because sin affects the totality of creation, and therefore Christians have no choice but to be involved in the work of renewing creation because "everywhere Christ's victory is pregnant with the defeat of sin and the recovery of creation."[480]

3.4.8 Grace restores nature: in practice

Cultural renewal is not without its complications. Wolters explains that there is a battle for all created structures at a directional level but that this battle "rages *for the sake of* the created structure" in order that grace might restore nature.[481] Therefore Christians must be involved in the renewal, *not the rejection* of created structures because "the status quo is never acceptable."[482] Wolters chooses renewal in favour of revolution because grace restores nature; it does not seek to overthrow it. This is especially pertinent in considering matters of social, gender, racial, and economic equality. For example, Christian political activism is necessary because it reminds the state of its responsibility to administer public justice.[483] Cultural renewal is a matter of "framing the question" with a reformational worldview, and through "the corrective lens of Scripture."[484] Following in the footsteps of Kuyper and Bavinck, the idea that grace restores nature is at the heart of cultural renewal. It is what drives a positive view of creation, and the meaningfulness of cultural works. It is

[479] Creation and the Fall are distinct from each other. Sin has affected every aspect of reality but it has not destroyed it. Only when the life of faith is exercised in all "realms" of life can God's original intentions for creation be fulfilled. See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 63-68. In Kuyperian terms we might refer to the effect of sin on the totality of creation as the antithesis.

[480] In his role as redeemer and Son of God Christ links cultural renewal to divine authority. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 73.

[481] His point is that this is not an other-worldly battle but that it happens "*in* and *for* the concrete reality of the earthly creation." Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 88.

[482] Christians must fight for renewal at all levels of society and cultural development. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 94.

[483] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 100.

[484] An implication of the concept of worldview is that a person always has one, whether they are aware of it, and the question that both Kuyper and Wolters pose is: which worldview is framing the questions? For Kuyper it had to be the Calvinist worldview, otherwise it would be the Modernist, pantheistic worldview. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 115.

essential to a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement because it gives it a trajectory of restoration.[485]

3.4.9 Justice, truth, and reconciliation in cultural renewal

The implications for the Reformed tradition in terms of cultural renewal are profound, as the situation in South Africa makes plain: what constitutes "Reformed" must move away from traditional boundaries, particularly racial and national boundaries, and seek justice, truth, and reconciliation.[486] With this in mind, is it legitimate to seek a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement that is founded upon Kuyperian, Dutch, Reformed theology? Kuyper scholar James Skillen suggests that Kuyper still has much to contribute to critiquing dominant ideologies of the present-day, something which is crucial to cultural engagement and renewal as described in this chapter.[487] Kuyper's emphasis on pluriformity in society, that finds unity in Christ, drove his public Christianity and consequently his idea of sphere sovereignty:

> Kuyper, unlike most other Christian leaders of his days, believed that God's creating and redeeming purposes in Christ support, even require, the differentiation of human responsibilities on earth, each with authority and integrity in its own sphere. No human institution holds society together or bears omnicompetent authority; God alone holds the world and history together, and for that reason humans are free to bear diverse responsibilities without subordinating one to the other, heeding God's creational ordinances in all spheres at all times.[488]

Sphere sovereignty, then, is still key to Christian cultural engagement that leads to cultural renewal and that understands and upholds the complexity (and sovereignty) of the cultural "other". Skillen points out that the ways in which

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[485] Craig Bartholomew describes Bavinck's creation theology as having a "telos" which is "*restoration* and not repristination. The move in Scripture is from garden to city and not a move from garden to garden. God leads his creation toward the destiny he intended for it from the very beginning." Bartholomew, *Contours*, 49. Keller reflects this view in his call to cultural engagement in the city: he writes that "the garden of Eden becomes a garden *city*." Keller, *Center Church*, 151.

[486] Botman, "Is Blood Thicker Than Justice?" 361.

[487] James W. Skillen, "Why Kuyper Now?" in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan. Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2000), 365. This is not to whitewash over the blatant racism, sexism, and other difficulties found in Kuyper, but to critically examine him, even as we use Kuyper to critically examine our own cultural context.

[488] Skillen, "Why Kuyper Now?" 366.

society is both differentiated and integrated must "do justice to all…institutions and to all the people who bear…multiple responsibilities."[489] Therefore, justice, truth, and reconciliation must be prominent features of cultural engagement that seeks cultural renewal and this is due to the worldview that underpins Kuyperianism: that of Christ's sovereignty over all things in all creation, without exclusion.

3.5 Conclusion: Contemporary Neo-Calvinism and Cultural Engagement

The purpose of this literature review has been to listen to contemporary theologians as they develop Kuyperian ideas either implicitly or explicitly in the pursuit of cultural engagement for two reasons: 1) to ascertain the extent to which contemporary neo-Calvinism already engages with the complex cultural "other" and 2) to assess the suitability of the neo-Calvinist movement as a dialogue partner with cultural anthropology. In addressing these issues I considered three themes which will form the content for a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology: 1) that our complex cultural worlds, or spheres, are both meaningful and undefinable; 2) multiple perspectives arise from cultural complexity and pluriformity, therefore cultural engagement must approach the cultural "other" in context; 3) when Christian cultural engagement takes a positive view of creation it will seek the flourishing of the cultural "other" by giving meaning and purpose to cultural works. Through highlighting Kuyperian themes of common and special grace, the antithesis, and sphere sovereignty, these themes were expanded to emphasise the status of economic, social, racial, and gender justice in cultural engagement. Scholars such as Mouw, Wolterstorff, Chaplin, Storkey, Botman, and Bacote have demonstrated a neo-Calvinism commitment to the pursuit of characteristics of justice, humility, mercy, and hospitality in their treatment of the complex cultural other. As Chaplin writes, "More than ever, we need to keep faith with the possibility of the state as an effective servant of justice, a state which, heeding

[489] Skillen, "Why Kuyper Now?" 368.

the prayerful urgency of Psalm 72, 'defends the cause of the poor of the people, gives deliverance to the needy, and crushes the oppressor' (v4)."[490]

3.5.1 The importance of civility for cultural engagement

One of the most endearing aspects to Mouw's scholarship is his self-awareness. Despite his "quest" for commonness, his strong advocacy of common grace, and his commitment to civility and dialogue with different groups in society, he maintains a sober judgment and self-reflection that guards against moving too far from the Reformed tradition in which neo-Calvinism stands. He writes that he has "sensed a genuine calling" to be an advocate of a gentle and respectful evangelicalism but that "all any of us can do…is to move ahead with what we believe God wants us to do, in the confidence that his sovereign purposes will come to pass."[491] This seems to stand squarely in the Kuyperian tradition of remaining faithful to the Reformed tradition while seeking to apply that tradition to new contexts and changing societies. This kind of civility is necessary for any approach towards the cultural "other" including cultural anthropology.

3.5.2 The importance of ongoing development for cultural engagement

The issue of updating Kuyper for the contemporary cultural context is an act of self-awareness, and vital to the work of Christian cultural engagement, and it must be ongoing. The neo-Calvinism currently flourishing will require the pruning and tending Kuyper himself suggests in generations to come.[492] However, the neo-Calvinism currently flourishing proves itself to be both an appropriate theological foundation for Christian cultural engagement and a suitable dialogue partner for cultural anthropology in the following ways. Firstly, Wolterstorff's concern for justice and shalom with Storkey's research into violence against women, and Bacote and Botman's exhortation to rethink race and ethnicity in Kuyperianism creates an appropriate balance between how to think and how to act. Secondly, Chaplin's exhortation to hold out hope for a just state and Botman's and Storkey's call for cultural institutional transformation provides further opportunity and scope for theologians to apply Kuyperian ideas

[490] Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 12.
[491] Mouw, *Adventures*, 221.
[492] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

further into other areas of injustice, including economic and ecological injustices. In these first two chapters I have attempted to outline the historical and contemporary contexts for neo-Calvinism in order to lay the foundation for such a dialogue. Because much of neo-Calvinist thinking is to do with human behaviour there are similarities with the issues raised in cultural anthropology. However, before moving on to developing a dialogue between the two, Chapter Four is concerned with a literature review of cultural anthropology as a distinct discipline.

Chapter Four: Learning from Cultural Anthropology: Cultural Complexity, Post-Cultural Ethnography, and the Priority of "the Other"

4.1 Introduction: Anthropology and Theology

This thesis is concerned with renewing Christian cultural engagement for the contemporary cultural climate by developing an approach that upholds the complexity of the cultural "other". To facilitate this renewal, I am placing the Reformed tradition via neo-Calvinism in dialogue with cultural anthropology. In this chapter I turn to the field of cultural anthropology in order to find out how "culture" is understood from those working within this discipline, and the arising issues that need consideration in theological cultural engagement. Beginning with a brief survey of the relationship between theology and anthropology I will move on to three areas of contemporary cultural anthropology which relate to the three themes of the previous chapter: the indefinability and meaningfulness of cultural spheres, multiperspectivalism and contextualization, and cultural renewal through cultural works. The three related areas are: 1) the "writing culture" debate of the 1970's which broke new ground in issues of self-awareness and cultural complexity, 2) the ensuing problem with defining "culture" absolutely, and 3) the place of "the other" and the pursuit of "otherness" in post-cultural anthropology. Throughout this chapter I will refer to several anthropologists and their contributions to these three areas, with the main voices belonging to George Marcus, James Clifford, Stephen Tyler, Jack Eller, Louise Lawrence, Mario Aguilar, Joel Robbins, and Will Rollason.

4.1.1 Anthropology and theology: different starting points

Theologian-anthropologist Douglas Davies describes theology as "a formal reflection, description and account of religious experience, while anthropology presents theoretical interpretations of the life experiences of particular societies in general."[493] In contrast, anthropology is concerned with observing the behaviour of people in a specific time and place; it is human-centred. Theology is concerned with studying "the divine as self-disclosed, as a revelation of

[493] Theology begins with the premise that God exists; anthropology does not. Douglas J. Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 1.

himself"; it is God-centred.[494] This contrast is especially pertinent in a dialogue with Reformed theology which is founded upon biblical theology, and a Kuyperian worldview that presupposes a cosmic, Christological metanarrative.[495] However, as evidenced in the previous chapter, this metanarrative embraces complexity precisely because it is Christological and provides a foundation for civil dialogue with cultural anthropology.[496]

4.1.2 Conversation and challenge

Because of these different starting points the relationship between anthropology and theology has been comparative in nature, whereby theology has employed anthropological insights in mission studies, for example, and anthropology's interest in theology has extended to comparing the religious belief systems of different societies.[497] Davies calls his work a "theological-anthropological conversation" designed to compare similar concepts in both disciplines and to highlight the challenges either discipline brings to the other.[498] A relevant example of this which will be pursued later in this chapter is that anthropology disturbs deeply held religious assumptions leading to a new awareness of self.[499] However, because of their different starting points and priorities, thus far from the perspective of anthropology, conversation and challenge have been the hallmark of their relationship.[500] In fact, the challenges and conversations that collaboration between anthropology and theology have thrown up are indicators of their "irreducible identities" as distinct spheres related to each other

[494] Davies acknowledges the difficulty of rendering God masculine and suggests that any gender-specification is equally unhelpful. Davies, *Theology and Anthropology*, 2.

[495] This is in reference to Kuyper's foundational belief that Christ rules every square inch of creation. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488.

[496] Because Christ rules over all creation, he also holds all things in unity in himself. See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 172-173.

[497] This demonstrates the motivation of each discipline: theology employs anthropology for a better understanding of how to communicate God's self-revelation in culturally relevant ways whereas anthropology is interested in the human behaviours of those engaged in religious practices.

[498] Davies avoids prioritising theology over anthropology in his attempt to allow both disciplines to contribute equally to the conversation. Davies, *Theology and Anthropology*, 3.

[499] Davies suggests that this brings about a "philosophical distress" because it requires a critical reflection upon our perception of reality. While sociological scholarship has made this possible this kind of self-critique is not always appreciated. Davies, *Theology and Anthropology*, 3-4.

[500] In this regard, the interest has been more one-sided with theology employing anthropological tools. Davies, *Theology and Anthropology*, 2.

in an organic whole: the field of academic study.[501] Their different starting points, then, may be viewed positively from a Kuyperian perspective, rather than negating the usefulness of continued dialogue between the two.

4.1.3 Anthropology and biblical studies

A further example of collaboration is found in the collective research of biblical scholars and anthropologists entitled *Anthropology & Biblical Studies*. Biblical studies scholar Louise Lawrence describes how an attempt to understand biblical texts from within their cultural context carries with it the risk of objectification and colonisation.[502] Employing anthropological methods influences traditional approaches to biblical scholarship in a way that "can greatly enrich our own context-bound perspectives on people and texts."[503] Approaching biblical scholarship through the lens of anthropology allows the data of a specific biblical text to speak for itself and interact with other similar examples of ethnography, thereby creating an intertextuality which deepens both the theological and anthropological disciplines involved.[504] From a Kuyperian perspective intertextuality stems from creational plurality which allows humankind to glimpse more fully the image of God "in the combination of all talent and genius."[505]

4.1.4 Intertextuality in practice

An example of this intertextuality is Karen Wenell's research into sacred land with an emphasis on Israel during the period of the Second Temple and the Maori *Hauhau* movement. Wenell places her insights into the dissatisfaction and political restlessness of the Jews leading up to the time of Jesus' ministry

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[501] For Jonathan Chaplin, Kuyper's sphere sovereignty is to do with both the principle of non-absorption and the idea of "irreducible identities". Jonathan Chaplin, "The Concept of "Civil Society" and Christian Social Pluralism," The Kuyper Center Review, Vol. 1: Politics, Religion, and Sphere Sovereignty, 2010, ed. Gordon Graham, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 18.

[502] Lawrence explains that any attempt to understand individuals, communities, practices, and belief systems which are different to ourselves needs to be "methodologically sophisticates, wary of any attempt to objectify them and sensitive to their diversity and individuality." Lawrence, "Introduction," 11.

[503] This acclamation of cultural anthropology comes from Philip Esler and David Clark, whose research into the cultural contexts of specific foci in the New Testament rely heavily on anthropological approaches. Lawrence, "Introduction," 13.

[504] In Lawrence's words, this "stresses the importance of acknowledging individual perspectives and social diversity." Lawrence, "Introduction," 17.

[505] Kuyper, "Common Grace and Science," 445.

alongside her reflections upon the same escalation amongst the Maoris after colonization, and suggests that Jesus, like Te Ua, the prophetic leader of the *HauHau* movement, took traditional teachings and gave them new meaning and new hope for change. The land of the Jews under Roman occupation and the land of the Maori after colonization both changed, and with them "symbolic resources" also changed. Both Te Ua and Jesus, seen here as millenarian leaders, promised a new life that sprang from the compromise of their land as sacred and as a social space for them to practice their beliefs.[506] In keeping with the nature of interdisciplinary research discussed above, Wenell is not aiming at one truth in her exploration of these different cultural and historical contexts, neither is she attempting a simple comparison study. Her purpose is to observe how beliefs change over time when those beliefs become unsustainable during crisis times, such as the compromise of, and threatened expulsion from, sacred land.[507] Wenell uses anthropology as a lens through which to explore biblical data to discover richer meanings that do not depend on traditional models.

4.1.5 Viewing theology through the lens of anthropology

In a similar way to the work of Davies, Lawrence, and Wenell, this thesis is using anthropology as a lens through which to explore the theology and practice of cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition in an attempt to view and understand things differently. I will further pursue this interdisciplinary approach to theological cultural engagement in Chapter Four in the introduction to the dialogue between theology and cultural anthropology. Theologian and anthropologist Mario Aguilar describes in greater detail how anthropological readings of biblical texts can further unseat the traditional historical-critical approaches of biblical scholarship through the deconstruction of universal paradigms and the idea of "culture." Because of the complex relationships between one who writes about a text, e.g. a biblical scholar or an anthropologist, and one who reads it, nothing can be viewed as an entirely

[506] See e.g., Karen Wenell, "Land as Sacred in the Jesus Movement and the *HauHau* Religion," in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach*, ed. Louise J. Lawrence and Mario I. Aguilar (Leiden: Deo, 2004), 218, 221, 223.

[507] Wenell underlines the importance of considering "place" as both sacred and social and its impact upon change both socially and spiritually within religious communities. Wenell, "Land as Sacred," 223.

objective reality. Therefore, in comparing texts, or in comparing data, the scholar must bear in mind that it is impossible to arrive at a single truth. Instead what the scholar must aim for is "a social awareness of difference." [508] However, Aguilar explains that in order for this to continue, ongoing developments within anthropology particularly around the contemporary debates about "culture" must be taken into consideration when applying anthropological approaches to biblical scholarship.[509] This chapter will consider these contemporary debates and how they may influence the direction of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

4.1.6 Expected outcomes

In the following chapter I will bring together the concerns of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology in a discussion around the three main themes already raised in previous chapters, which will also reflect the expected outcomes of this chapter. These themes are 1) Cultural analysis requires an acknowledgment that "culture" is both meaningful and undefinable; 2) Because "culture" is complex and requires multiple perspectives, theological cultural engagement must be contextual in nature, while remaining faithful to the tradition; 3) Theological cultural engagement that is founded upon a positive view of creation gives cultural works and human cultural development meaning and a future purpose. These themes, and the expected outcomes of this chapter which concerns cultural anthropology will lead to a clearer understanding of what a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement will look like in terms of the complex, cultural "other".

4.2 *Writing Culture*, Self-awareness, and Cultural Complexity

Through the 1970's and 80's a shift occurred in cultural anthropology; a shift hallmarked by recognition of the way in which "culture" is constructed through

[508] Aguilar writes: "there are no discoveries but insights, no explanations but interpretations, and an absence of hypotheses but the presence of argumentation." Aguilar, "Changing Models," 304.

[509] In describing the ongoing process of change and development in the use of anthropology within biblical scholarship Aguilar writes: "I am afraid that such a process would require the death of "culture" and the ongoing integration of Mediterranean concepts into and ever-growing work on the epistemology of human society, and its influence in our understanding of future hermeneutical projects related to the biblical text." Aguilar, "Changing Models," 310-311.

the textualization by anthropologists of cultural accounts.[510] The realization that many processes and changes influence and have the power to change cultural forms led to a rethinking of how "culture" should be defined. Clifford and Marcus, cultural anthropologists writing at that time, brought together anthropologists who offered their interpretations of this continual cultural construction and pointed back to earlier anthropological writing in which the hints of this cultural dynamism could be seen.[511] The title of their work, *Writing Culture*, was designed to capture both a description *of* ethnography, and what happens *through* ethnography. It is both a writing about "culture" and a means by which "culture" is written and created.

4.2.1 The new age of "Writing Culture"

In anthropology, forerunners of the "writing culture" debate constructed universal paradigms by which different cultural contexts could be understood; these paradigms behaved like spectacles that when worn by the observer made the otherwise blurry and incomprehensible appear meaningful and familiar.[512] Crucially, these paradigms sprang from the perspective of the observer, the recognition of which already existed in anthropologists such as Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss.[513] The study of language, religious ritual, family relationships and other aspects of cultural contexts which were considered alien to the anthropologists was conducted scientifically; in fact Lévi-Strauss compares the anthropologist to an engineer "who conceives and constructs a machine by a series of rational operations."[514] However, even here Lévi-Strauss accommodates the inevitable influence of the anthropologist's subjective observations which foreshadows the issues raised by Clifford and Marcus and their contemporaries a decade later. The concept of "culture" as a means by

[510] Kim Fortun, "Foreword," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), xii.

[511] See e.g., James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), 101-102.

[512] Aguilar, "Changing Models," 300.

[513] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology*, trans. Sherry Ortner Paul and Robert A. Paul (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1967), 14.

[514] Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology*, 16.

which a society could be "perceived as unified by a centralized set of values, meanings and practices" was already entering a transition process.[515]

That transition process can be seen in Clifford Geertz's work; writing in 1973, he explains that only the person who can write a true interpretation of his society is a member of that society; any further accounts written by an anthropologist are further removed, and are, to a large extent, fictional.[516] That this represents a major evolution in cultural anthropology cannot be overestimated. As anthropologist Kim Fortun suggests, this transition marked an acknowledgment of "the inadequacies of universalism, essentialism, experience and representation."[517] It is a recognition of the complexity involved in writing about "culture" that will provide a vital lens through which to discuss theological cultural engagement.

4.2.2 Ethnographic self-awareness

In her foreword to the 25th Anniversary edition of *Writing Culture*, Kim Fortun writes that "culture can never be pinned down, but is always becoming, catalyzing, amassing new properties."[518] "Culture" is now seen in anthropological terms as being "composed of seriously contested codes and representations." [519] "Culture" is a moveable feast that emerges from its own texts and representations and is influenced by those who attempt to analyze it. Not only do human beings construct and change their cultural contexts all the time but those who write about different cultural contexts inevitably are also effecting change and construction.[520] Clifford writes: "Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another. Cultural analysis is always enmeshed in global movements of difference and power."[521] This poses difficulties for meaningful cultural analysis whether it is undertaken by the anthropologist or the theologian, particularly as the analyst will always bring her partiality to the analysis, and that partiality will be different

[515] Aguilar, "Changing Models," 305.
[516] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 15.
[517] Kim Fortun, "Foreword to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 2010), viii.
[518] Fortun, "Foreword," xv.
[519] Clifford, "Introduction," 2.
[520] See e.g., Clifford, "Introduction," 2-3.
[521] Clifford, "Introduction," 22.

for different people.[522] As seen in the previous chapter, self-awareness is a growing concept in neo-Calvinism, demonstrated, for example, through Mouw's pursuit of civil dialogue and through the updating of Kuyperian ideas in post-apartheid South Africa.

4.2.3 Constructing "culture"

This recognition of the role of the ethnographer in the construction of "culture" was a key issue in *Writing Culture*. Because of the complex nature of ethnography, it is vital that anyone writing about "culture" grasps their role in the construction of what they perceive to be that "culture." Self-awareness in cultural analysis, and the self-reflection that must proceed from it, are as important for the theologian as for the ethnographer. The "writing culture" debate is therefore vitally relevant to this thesis in helping to form questions regarding self-awareness for theologians and in providing a lens through which theologians to see the current strengths and weaknesses of their approaches. Seeing theological cultural engagement through the lens of cultural anthropology is vital because any person writing about "culture" will influence the way texts are represented and performed. There is a necessity to textualize "culture" in a way that engages with theory and argument, which is why this thesis advocates for a different approach to theological cultural engagement rather than arguing that it should not be done at all. However, this textualization, this writing about "culture" especially in theological terms should be undertaken in such a way that also calls for imagination and the possibility that fieldwork, or analysis will result in something beyond inquiry.[523]

4.2.4 From writing to evoking "culture"

This call for the employment of imagination in cultural analysis has an implication that goes beyond even the complex nature of ethnography, including self-awareness, and that is that it requires multiple perspectives to construct a picture of a particular cultural context. I referred to anthropologist Stephen Tyler in the thesis Introduction with regard to the idea of creating a dialogue for theological cultural engagement: his suggestion of a co-operatively evolved text

[522] Clifford, "Introduction," 18.
[523] Fortun, "Foreword," xii.

is linked to the idea that ethnography evokes a sense of "culture" rather than pursuing a substantive description:

> A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect.[524]

For Tyler this evocation of "an emergent fantasy of a possible world" does not lead to a single body of knowledge or one necessary course of action.[525] He writes that the scientific approach to ethnography has failed "because it violated the first law of culture, which says that "the more man controls anything, the more uncontrollable both become.""[526] If writing about cultural contexts can only suggest or evoke, rather than define "a culture" thoroughly, then it is necessary to take a wide view of those cultural contexts in order to gain the broadest picture possible. This broad picture will combine multiple perspectives including that of the person writing about "culture."[527] Whether conscious or unconscious, the very tools the ethnographer, or cultural analyst uses contributes to the ethnographic process as a whole and in turn shapes and modifies the cultural contexts it describes.[528]

4.2.5 Poetry, fantasy, and multiple perspectives

Tyler's description of ethnography as poetry suggests that any description of "culture" is intangible which is why multiple perspectives are necessary. Cultural analysis requires listening to several voices rather than just one, i.e. intertextuality. This dynamic nature of ethnography means that a particular "culture" cannot be described in detail; the continual movements and changes at work in cultural contexts demands an approach which creates an evocation, a glimpse, an imaginative conjuring of a cultural context which is akin to poetry.

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[524] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125.
[525] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography, 123.
[526] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 123.
[527] In *Writing Culture* anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt argues that the individual voice of the ethnographer as one who writes about cultural contexts is the mediator between fieldwork engagement and scientific description. Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), 33.
[528] Pratt, "Fieldwork," 38.

Furthermore, the “fantasy” that Tyler describes is a mixture of “commonsense” and sensuality. There is an impression of reality in an ethnographic text, but it relies on the imagination of the reader and writer to bring that reality alive. Both writer and reader are inescapably involved in being influenced by and in constructing cultural ideas. In considering theological cultural engagement, a multiplicity of perspectives is required because of the depth of interrelated and conflicting layers when it comes to defining precisely what “culture” may or may not be, and the continually changing movement of cultural processes.

4.2.6 Cultural complexity and theological cultural engagement

Writing Culture demonstrated that “culture” cannot be viewed as a homogenous block of knowledge to be studied, analysed, decoded, understood and controlled. This contemporary debate in anthropology continues to challenge the belief in essentialisms or rather that there are “universal paradigms that shape all social contexts.”[529] There has been a suspension of metanarratives and an emphasis on particularities, context, interpretations and diverse meanings.[530] This has become even more pronounced since *Writing Culture* as various influences on cultural productivity have rapidly multiplied, not least through the impact of technological development.[531] It is no longer sufficient to study a cultural context scientifically by applying objective absolutes and accepting that the anthropologist’s representation of cultural contexts was the final word.[532] In the present digital, globalized age, access to cultural texts is greater than ever before as is the speed by which cultural texts are processed, creating huge potential for a constant dynamic intra-cultural flow.[533] This poses

[529] Aguilar, “Changing Models,” 300.

[530] George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1999), 8.

[531] Fortun, “Foreword,” vii.

[532] Fortun, “Foreword,” viii.

[533] Fortun, “Foreword,” xv.

new, contemporary challenges for the cultural diversity present in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.

4.2.7 Implications for theological cultural engagement

The issue for theologians undertaking theological cultural engagement is how far their cultural presuppositions influence their analyses of "culture." As is clear from the "writing culture" debate, anyone who writes about "culture" needs both self-awareness and more than one perspective. Because "culture" consists of multiple, simultaneous, fluctuating, cultural processes, it is impossible to find a single definition. Since this complexity is what theological cultural engagement is dealing with it is inappropriate to keep using the term "culture" without clarification. Theologians need to be precise in articulating exactly what it is with which they wish to engage; for example, cultural changes, cultural artefacts, a cultural community or many different cultural contexts, cultural developments, or cultural clashes. A recognition and taking into account of cultural complexity is vital for theologians in any tradition who wish to engage with what they perceive as "culture."

4.2.8 Theological cultural engagement, self-awareness, and multiple perspectives

It is important, in the first instance, when considering how theologians are constructing their analysis to ask how aware they appear to be of their own contribution to the construction of "cultures." A further question concerns whether theologians impose generally held theological views, or even their own ideas about those theological views? Once again this demonstrates the intense complexity involved in cultural analysis, such that Tyler highlights, and points to the imperative for theologians to deploy self-awareness. Related to this is the second narrower question of whether theologians have assumed the role of impartial, objective interpreters of their own and other cultural contexts. Typically, ethnographers have been those who have held the key to unlocking the secrets of particular societies. For example, in his chapter in *Writing Culture*, Vincent Crapanzano likens the ethnographer to the Greek character Hermes in the sense that he is the one sent to uncover a message about a particular "culture." Crapanzo writes; "then like the magician, the hermeneut, Hermes

himself, he clarifies the opaque, renders the foreign familiar, and gives meaning to the meaningless. He decodes the message. He interprets." [534] Do theologians show similar characteristics in their attempts to tell the entire theological truth about cultural practices? Certainly, the negative impact of Dutch Calvinism on the cultural practices and sheer humanity of South African people of colour suggests that Reformed theology has been used as a blunt tool to carve away any vestiges of traditional cultural practices.

So far, this chapter has raised issues around "culture" from within the field of cultural anthropology. These issues have vital relevance for theological cultural engagement not least through suggesting that theologians need to see themselves as being involved in "writing culture" in their cultural analysis. Furthermore, these contemporary anthropological issues raise the question of whether neo-Calvinist theologians take a multiperspectival view of "culture," and whether neo-Calvinism has the capacity to address the cultural complexity raised through this chapter. Cultural complexity implies that one theologian's interpretation of their theological context will inevitably be different to another's interpretation because of the particular cultural movements that the individual theologian is influenced by. Self-awareness must play a significant role in theological cultural engagement because of the undeniable reality of cultural complexity.

4.2.9 Case study: being African and Reformed

In the previous chapters I referred to Botman's descriptions of the negative and positive influences of Reformed theology on race relations and social inequalities in South Africa. In moving forward, updating Kuyper for a post-apartheid situation requires a letting go of a white (Dutch) European view of what it means to be Reformed, and development of an Africanization of what it means to be Reformed. However, theologian Rothney Tshaka suggests that this requires a deeper level of self-awareness for the African who calls themselves "Reformed" because to be African and Reformed is a dichotomy:

[534] Vincent Crapanzano, "Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), 51.

> The African Reformed scholar is indeed different than his or her European counterpart. He or she insists on this identity because it speaks to a flight from the black or African self, the catalyst of which was the interruption that occurred as a result of colonialism and the exploitation of Africa and her people.[535]

This dual personality sets the African Reformed scholar apart from their fellow Africans, yet separates them from their white, European counterparts: a disjunction that can be directly traced back to the impact of Dutch Calvinism on native South Africans.[536] To be included in the Reformed family an African's identity had to be assimilated rather than a mutual integration of the two.[537] A significant part of self-identity for the African Reformed Christian is acknowledging and being truthful about the racist colonial past of Dutch Calvinism, and how it has contributed to the "self-hate" of the African mindset.[538] Another significant part of self-identity for the African Reformed Christian is the continued struggle to be accepted as an equal *and* as African at the Reformed theological table: this means pushing issues of racial, social, and economic justice onto the same page as other theological discussions in the Reformed tradition.[539] This reminder of the close affiliation between identity, cultural complexity, and Reformed theology underlines the anthropological imperative for self-awareness, and awareness of the cultural "other" in theological cultural engagement.

4.3 The Problem of Defining "Culture"

A greater understanding of cultural complexity has come from the contemporary debates surrounding the meaning of "culture" in anthropology and provides a crucial lens through which to view theological cultural engagement. Anthropologist Jack Eller defines cultural anthropology as "the study of the

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[535] Rothney S. Tshaka**, "**On being African and Reformed? Towards an African Reformed theology enthused by an interlocution of those on the margins of society," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 3, http:// dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.

[536] Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed?" 4.

[537] Tshaka writes: "It cannot be denied that the deliberate attempts at establishing this faith in South Africa, without inviting integration between this new faith and African culture, was informed by agendas that did not think Africa had anything to contribute to this debate." Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed?" 4.

[538] Tshaka attributes this to "the flight from the black self" induced by colonialism and the continued paternalistic view of Africans as children who need to be parented. Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed?" 3, 6.

[539] This is as opposed to treating these issues as social, rather than theological problems, or even they are considered to be theological issues, they are classed as lesser theologies. Tshaka, "On being Reformed and African?" 2.

diversity of human behaviour in the past and the present," although he also suggests it is not clear precisely what "culture" means in "cultural" anthropology.[540] Eller offers a description of "culture" as being something which is learned, shared, symbolic, integrated and adaptive but which is also without bounds and not necessarily exclusive to a particular society.[541] Furthermore, as indicated above, human beings are both learners and constructors of cultural processes, and therefore the contexts in which these learners and constructors operate will be diverse and changeable.[542] A substantive definition of "culture" is therefore elusive and the pursuit of it is futile. Instead, this section of the chapter will focus on discussing what human cultural change and development look like and their significance for humanity's continual search for meaning. I will refer to anthropologists Jack Eller and Stephen Tyler in this discussion.

4.3.1 Humanity's search for meaning

Humanity endures. Civilisations and their diverse cultural contexts have risen and fallen throughout human history yet humanity, building on the past and modifying it for the present and the future, endures. It is as though humans are involved in a constant struggle to find, preserve, and develop meaning and significance, and cultural construction is the outward expression of the results of this struggle at any given time in history. Eller explains that no longer can the word "culture" be used to refer to art or music or good manners.[543] Instead, cultural activities involve growth and cultivation.[544] In this sense, they are part of humanity's journey of development and significance. Clifford Geertz describes this search for meaning in this way: "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun."[545] Culturally, those "webs of significance" can have a visible manifestation; one only has to visit the ruins of the Acropolis in

[540] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology,* 6.
[541] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 26.
[542] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 27.
[543] The problem with this view is that it attaches "high" and "low" labels to cultural artefacts which enforces attitudes of cultural superiority. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 24.
[544] Eller writes, ""Culture" is an old word, derived from the Latin root *cultus* for "cultivated" and related to such words as cult and agriculture and other usages such as a bacteria culture. The common thread among them involves raising something or growing it into a particular form." Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 25.
[545] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

Athens or the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to understand that cultural development has to do with human identity and growth.

Eller states that “most if not all of the present problems and challenges facing humanity are cultural problems and challenges - related to how we identify ourselves, and how we interact as members of distinct human communities.”[546] The reason for this is that cultural processes are to do with growth and cultivation; processes which are continuous and organic. Cultural forms change and adapt; they are learned, modified, rejected and imitated.[547] Past cultural forms are vital foundations which can be discarded or reinvented depending on the present environment. Nevertheless, whether cultural processes change rapidly or slowly one thing is clear: cultural development is not an optional extra for human beings, but necessary for them to be complete and finished.[548] Cultural development is quintessential to the humanity’s search for meaning.

4.3.2 Evoking “culture” through multiple perspectives

Clifford describes the multiperspectival character of ethnography in this way: “Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration and is itself part of these processes.”[549] This description of ethnography provides an insight into the complexity of cultural processes, cultural relationships, cultural commodities, cultural artefacts, cultural contexts, cultural histories, cultural futures, cultural change, and cultural development. Cultural processes are always in motion but “fragments of discourse” from multiple perspectives on those processes can evoke a sense of cultural reality.[550]

Eller suggests that a quantitative definition of “culture” is not possible particularly in Western society because it contains “many subcultures and even countercultures that vary from - often deviate from - each other and the “mainstream” culture.”[551] Nevertheless, humans have the capacity to learn and

[546] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, xix.
[547] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 25, 33.
[548] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 27.
[549] Clifford, “Introduction,” 2-3.
[550] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 369.
[551] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 30.

share the belief and behavioural system of a particular society.[552] This is what has typically been understood as "culture." However, this cultural learning is active, not passive, in the sense that production and reproduction, assimilation and elimination happen simultaneously.[553] Therefore "culture" cannot be defined simply as a concrete visible expression of a particular human society because there is an active dynamism involved as cultural processes fulfil particular roles among and between different groups of peoples, and enables human societies to learn, change and develop. For example, Eller, citing Clifford Geertz, writes that "culture is best understood not as abstract ideas nor as concrete behaviour but "as a set of control mechanisms - plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call 'programs') - for the governing of behaviour."" [554] This statement is in keeping with the idea that cultural processes are learned and shared, as long as these "mechanisms" are not static and are able to continually adapt and be transformed through the exchange of cultural expressions between groups of societies.

These cultural processes are expressed through the building of cultural artefacts and the continual formation of new cultural contexts. These contexts may be large popular cultural groups or smaller, minority sub-cultural groups; one is even at liberty to choose one's own cultural identity.[555] Little wonder that these complexities lead Tyler to suggest that cultural worlds can only be hinted at, suggested, and evoked imaginatively. Attempts to define "culture" as a single, indivisible entity are futile.

4.3.3 Cultural change and cultural development

Another problem with defining "culture" is that cultural change and cultural development are not always synonymous with each other, and if both are occurring simultaneously in one cultural context who can say exactly which is being observed? Because cultural processes are always moving and developing and involves contradiction and dialogue, cultural exchanges are not always positive.[556] Cultural dominance leads societies to either differing

[552] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 29.
[553] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*,34.
[554] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 35.
[555] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 380.
[556] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 272, 280.

degrees of acculturation (the taking on of a second cultural identity) or to ethnocide (the destruction of "the culture or institution of a group rather than the people themselves").[557] Cultural change is often forced and directed.

In contrast, cultural development happens as human internalize their immediate surrounding cultural context.[558] Members of the same social group will interpret the learned values and practices of their cultural context slightly differently. Eller describes how this process of enculturation contributes "to the shaping of human individuality" along with the nurturing of those learned cultural practices.[559] As individual members of different cultural communities interact and share their interpretations of their contexts together cultural development takes place. This poses a challenge to Kuyper's sphere sovereignty: how do spheres remain distinct while interacting in this continually fluctuating way?

4.3.4 Which cultural movement(s)?

A further challenge is posed because cultural change and development happen as new cultural movements emerge through the syncretisation of existing ones.[560] This multiplication of cultural movements leaves a person at liberty to choose their cultural identity or identities, or even construct an entirely new cultural identity for themselves.[561] This dynamic shift in the way cultural contexts are formed has been further exacerbated by the commodification of cultural artefacts. Cultural processes are now on the market and cultural tourism is a prolific seller.[562] The disposability of popular cultural expressions appeals to the consumer market where cultural artefacts are aimed towards the lowest common denominator and produced en masse at the cheapest price.[563] Is it still plausible to speak about social institutions and spheres in this contemporary climate? Can a person ever know their distinctiveness, or God-given calling, if they are at liberty to change their cultural identities at will? There are no

[557] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 285.
[558] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 105.
[559] Eller suggests that the formation of new cultural movements out of a syncretism of existing cultural movements is inevitable. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 107.
[560] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 371.
[561] Eller calls this the "ethnographic condition" whereby individuals write their own "culture." Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 379.
[562] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 380-1.
[563] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 381.

straightforward answers to these questions, but a consideration of the complexities of social contexts can provide a way forward.

In the Introduction to this thesis I referred to theologian Ted Turnau's engagement with "popular culture" and drew attention to his dismissal of the social context of popular cultural artefacts. In contrast Eller believes that even popular cultural expressions can be meaningful: "Underneath the transitory characters and stories are the deep myths, values, and symbols of the society. Popular culture is, after all, one way that a society tells its stories over and over again."[564] Popular cultural artefacts cannot be engaged with in isolation from their social contexts: "popular culture" is a movement made up of many different movements. This is merely a further example of the difficulty in defining what "culture" or "popular culture" is. All kinds of theological cultural engagement must grapple with this complexity, applying multiple perspectives, avoiding the pitfall of analysing cultural artefacts out of context, and applying anthropological tools to complex cultural processes.

4.3.5 Cultural complexity and the ethnographic journey

The popular cultural movement is an example of how cultural processes change and shift through cultural movements across the globe. Just as cultural processes are always in motion, they are also continually evolving. Whatever evolution is yet before the world in terms of globalization or "glocalization," societies will perpetuate that evolution, mythologizing it, drawing from it the principles that continue to govern and change their behaviours.[565] Whether the future is one of cultural contexts which are "diverse and continually changing" or one where cultural movements or even civilisations come together in war and hostility, it is vital to remember that all cultural contexts are always in flux; what has been before, and what is now, may not be what is to come.[566] Neo-Calvinism will survive if it continues to become increasingly self-aware, and able to return to its roots to continually reapply them to the contemporary age.

[564] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 382.
[565] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 386.
[566] See e.g., Eller's description of the four future views of "culture" in Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 383-387.

This question of "where is culture heading?" returns us to the importance of cooperation between disciplines. Tyler's distinction between representation and evocation, quoted earlier in this chapter, suggests that cultural contexts are best evoked by several voices rather than just one, therefore intertextuality and discourse are vital for modern ethnography.[567] However, this discourse must be undertaken with Tyler's caveat: "Ethnographic discourse is not part of a project whose aim is the creation of universal knowledge."[568] Neither is part of a project ultimately define "culture." To use cultural analysis in order to subvert, convert, or even transform cultural processes in order to conform them to a body of theological knowledge is to ignore cultural complexity. Theologians, together with anthropologists, enter into the ethnographic adventure as travellers unsure of their destination whose expedition is not necessarily planned in detail but will evolve with every step. Tyler writes: "I call ethnography a meditative vehicle because we come to it neither as to a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action, nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different kind of journey."[569]

4.3.6 Neo-Calvinism as a cultural movement

Eller argues that the reason cultural identity is now a matter of choice for an individual, certainly in the post-modern climate of the West, is because ideologies rather than reality form the basis for cultural expression.[570] This idea relates back to the ethnographic debates surrounding the fictional construction of a cultural context that happens through writing about it. This is different to the poetic evocation of cultural contexts that is formed by diverse accounts and descriptions of that context; instead it is akin to myth, and mythological depictions of cultural contexts may prove unsuitable material for theological analysis. It is not necessarily *cultural contexts* which are ideological but the interpretations, descriptions, and judgements *about* those contexts. Theology within the broad category of the Reformed tradition is an ideological cultural

[567] See e.g. George E. Marcus, "Afterword: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (California: California University Press, 1986), 265.
[568] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 131.
[569] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 140.
[570] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 380.

movement in the sense that it seeks to uncompromisingly uphold specific biblical doctrines as it carries out theological cultural engagement.[571]

4.3.7 Neo-Calvinism: a "revitalisation movement"?

In particular, from the literature reviews of the previous two chapters, it may be possible to describe neo-Calvinism as a "revitalisation movement." According to Eller these are "conscious, deliberate, and organized efforts on the part of some member(s) of a society to create a new, better, and more satisfying culture."[572] The movement begins in a small way but may quickly spread to influence the mainstream cultural identity of that society and Eller describes these movements as having religious and political overtones.[573] Ideological cultural movements like these tend to have overtones of hostility towards surrounding cultural contexts. This is because, as has already been discussed, cultural change is inevitable. Human beings continually build, adapt, influence and are influenced by multiple cultural processes.[574] Cultural change affects all cultural movements including ideological ones and can result in acculturation.[575] This is inevitable from an anthropological perspective but for ideological movements it poses a threat to the belief system that governs the movement. If this is compromised it may cause the collapse of those cultural expressions which distinguish that movement from others and may ultimately result in the dwindling and final extinction of the group.[576] If the Reformed theological tradition is plagued at all by any of these ideological characteristics, then it makes a simple definition of "culture" even more complicated.

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[571] Calvin, *Institutes*, 23.

[572] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 369-370.

[573] Eller refers to five of these movements but two of them – fundamentalism and millenarianism – have ideological overtones. Fundamentalism is to do with returning to and preserving the foundational beliefs of a society in order to protect it from external influence and internal compromise; millenarianism is to do with actively working towards a better future for a specific society. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 371-372, 375.

[574] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 27.

[575] Eller writes, "In essence, acculturation is the process of culture change that occurs as a result of intense and sustained contact between two societies. Whenever there is such contact there is going to be a circulation or flow of culture (and sometimes genes too) between the two societies." Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 280.

[576] Eller describes this as fundamentalism, or nativism. It is a movement that "emphasizes local or "traditional" culture and values and resistance to or even elimination of alien culture and values." This movement can be, but is not necessarily exclusively, religious in nature and is to do with preserving the fundamental elements of a society at any cost. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 375.

4.3.8 Neo-Calvinism and the definition of "culture"

Theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition draws on biblical and theological traditions of the past in order to understand how the Church is to engage with its contemporary cultural context, and whatever cultural changes are to come.[577] However, although this traditional approach is at the heart of neo-Calvinist theology it does not necessarily need to produce the negative outworking of hostility and anger that cultural fundamentalism suggests.[578] It has been clear from the previous two chapters that neo-Calvinist theology has the resources to offer multiple perspectives on cultural processes at work in society. Two of these resources are a commitment to the idea of common grace and a positive theology of creation. Neo-Calvinism offers alternative ways of applying Reformed theology to cultural engagement, demonstrating that just as the Reformed tradition cannot be accurately represented by the ideological label, neither can "culture" be represented by a single, monochrome, narrow definition. Importantly, neo-Calvinism offers an alternative to the method of analysing specific cultural artefacts such as music, art, and film, and employs a broader perspective on cultural engagement.

4.4 "The Other", "Otherness", and Post-cultural Ethnography

Thus far, a survey of cultural anthropology has provided a lens through which to view "culture" as complex, diverse, fluctuating, and changeable. It is impossible to find a once-for-all definition of "culture." What is required is a multiperspectival approach to understanding cultural processes, cultural movements, cultural contexts, and cultural communities and their members, their expressions, and their artefacts. This means that theologians may need to re-evaluate their approaches to cultural engagement, not least through becoming self-aware in their writing. As Clifford writes, ""Cultures" do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power

[577] Eller explains that fundamentalism is not committed to safeguarding the cultural values of the past, but to use that "past to imagine or construct the future." Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 375.

[578] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 375.

relationship."[579] One way in which this can be avoided is by cultivating a "taste for the other" in theological cultural engagement.[580] This section will examine what this means first with reference to Louise Lawrence and Mario Aguilar, and then how this transpires into a sense of "otherness" with reference to anthropologists Joel Robbins and Will Rollason.

4.4.1 "The other" in cultural analysis

An inevitable progression from the contemporary debates surrounding "culture" in anthropology has been the post-colonial cultivation of an awareness of the needs and identity of those who are culturally different to us.[581] Louise Lawrence writes, "Anthropology helps us straddle the divide between seeing "others" as cultural copies of ourselves and, on the other hand, seeing them as radically "other" from us."[582] This is an advantage of a discipline concerned with observation, particularly in the post-colonial anthropological climate, and can have a profound effect upon how cultural engagement is approached from within the Christian community. For example, in biblical studies it can guard against "anachronistic" and "ethnocentric" approaches both of which impose a sense of cultural hierarchy.[583] In theological cultural engagement this approach towards "the other" can also offer a way out of ethnocentric attitudes of religious and cultural superiority.

This straddling of the divide between two extreme views of "the other" means that it is not appropriate to either project cultural assumptions, whether they are anthropological or theological, or to avoid the difference of "the other" altogether by refusing to engage. Instead, Lawrence writes that "our dealings with "others" are to be methodologically sophisticated, wary of any attempt to objectify them

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[579] Those who write about members of different cultural communities must be careful to avoid these pitfalls. Writing from within a theological tradition about a popular cultural artefact, for example, may easily lead to simplification, exclusion, an arbitrary choice as a focus, an imagined relationship between the theologian and the social context of the artefact, and the imposition of a doctrinal system upon that artefact. Clifford, "Introduction," 10.

[580] This is taken from the title of Lawrence's chapter in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies*. Lawrence, "Introduction," 9.

[581] Lawrence explains that tradition anthropological approaches have always included the view of "the native" in ethnography – the "emic" perspective – alongside the view of the observer – the "etic" perspective. However, the view of "the native" was still bound up in a particular cultural attitude (e.g., the colonised, primitive savage). This view continues to be deconstructed in contemporary anthropology. Lawrence, *Introduction*, 10.

[582] Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[583] Lawrence refers to biblical scholars who have used cross-cultural techniques in their scholarship to avoid these hermeneutical pitfalls. Lawrence, "Introduction," 11.

and sensitive to their diversity and individuality."[584] Implications of this for theological cultural engagement are obvious: any dealings with members of cultural communities, or with those who use cultural commodities, or who produce cultural artefacts which are different to our specific Christian cultural community cannot be simplified, objectified, or avoided. Theological cultural engagement, like anthropology, requires sophisticated approaches that reflect the individuality of "the other" amidst the complexities of cultural processes.

4.4.2 Viewing "the other"; viewing ourselves

From this description of "the other" both self-awareness and *other*-awareness are vital for all our cultural encounters. Lawrence continues: "bestowing us with "A Taste for the Other", anthropology also teaches that until we seek to know others, we can never have a balanced view of our own identity."[585] This echoes Davies' suggestion that anthropology unsettles deeply held religious beliefs by creating distance between us and our presuppositions.[586] This in turn leads to a greater self-awareness.[587] Anthropology requires a greater understanding of the complexities of cross-cultural interactions, acknowledging that we are all, to some degree, "others" to other people.[588] Becoming aware of "the other" also means engaging with them on equal terms not merely acting out of tolerance or even a shared humanity.[589] Anthropologists and theologians alike take their place on an equal footing aware of themselves and their cultural assumptions, and similarly aware of others. However, a question hangs over whether "cultivating a taste for "the other"" is merely another way to know ourselves; to boost one's own self-understanding rather than being truly for "the other". Christian cultural engagement that seeks to uphold the complexity of the cultural

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[584] "The other" is neither a "completely open book" nor "forever foreign to the interpreter." Lawrence, "Introduction," 11.

[585] Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[586] Both Lawrence and Davies refer to anthropologist Lévi Strauss who described totemic objects as providing a way for human beings to think about thinking, specifically about their "human condition." See e.g., Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 4.

[587] Davies extends this idea to our encounters with God who is "the other." God is "another culture" with which we engage in order to understand "it" and ourselves better. Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 26.

[588] Lawrence acknowledges that contemporary cultural interpretations must sit alongside traditional approaches because "interpretation changes in light of ideological developments and trends." Lawrence, "Introduction," 21.

[589] Lawrence refers to Geertz's statement that we must see ourselves "amongst others, as a local example of the forms of human life locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds." This the hard work of anthropology. Clifford Geertz, cited in Lawrence, "Introduction," 21.

"other" requires an approach that is truly *for* "the other" and therefore an approach that seeks an emptying of self that is Christological.

This chapter has shown that beginning with the "writing culture" debate, contemporary anthropology has deconstructed the idea of "culture" to the extent that individuality and diversity must be among the priorities of all kinds of ethnography.[590] Theological cultural engagement is cultural analysis therefore it is a kind of ethnography. Therefore, the same deconstruction applies to theological cultural engagement. As Lawrence states elsewhere, anthropology "widens our gaze, from our own narrow cultural context, immeasurably."[591] Anthropology is what can give theological cultural engagement a "taste for "the other" alongside a demand for self-awareness on the part of any theologian engaged in cultural analysis.

4.4.3 "The other" without bounds

Another implication of the reality of cultural complexities in contemporary anthropology is that neither the self nor "the other" are required to be bound by traditional meanings of cultural realities. For example, anthropologist-theologian Mario Aguilar writes: "The ordinary use of *culture* as a word that encompasses shared customs, practices and therefore meanings has been recently challenged."[592] This means that human beings no longer have to operate under the authority of a fixed system of shared beliefs. Aguilar is more extreme when he says that "cultures" "do not exist. Instead groups of human beings that share some common understanding, but also fight for their own identity within other groups from without and within, interact within larger contested worlds."[593] This is significant for "the other" and for the self in cultural analysis because it places the priority upon individual identity. The examples of theological cultural engagement I cited in the introduction to this thesis give the impression of theologians fighting for their tradition's identity within contemporary "culture" as

[590] Fortun writes, "Cultural analysis and ethnography are matters of design and production, which work by changing what is said and sayable, who speaks and who relates, what gets left alone and what gets shaken up." This deconstruction of traditional approaches causes complexity in relationships where awareness of "the other" and "the self" are now a vital element of ethnography. Fortun, "Foreword," xx.

[591] This is the context of reading biblical texts with anthropology, but it applies further afield to other theological disciplines. Lawrence, *Reading with Anthropology*, 22.

[592] Aguilar, "Changing models," 308.

[593] Aguilar, "Changing models," 307.

the Christian gospel is contested within and by other cultural groups.[594] This implies that in these approaches to cultural engagement the priority is the identity of the theologian and their tradition, not "the other" with whom they are engaging.

4.4.4 Post-colonial anthropology

Post-colonial contemporary anthropology challenges the above approach to theological cultural engagement because it depends upon a traditional type of cultural analysis which upholds colonial and essentialist attitudes.[595] Aguilar challenges these attitudes by saying that although human beings share some similarities "they do not share a culture," and that the continual insistence that they do share a "culture" does an injustice to the complexity of cultural processes experienced by individual human beings.[596] As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, using the word "culture" as a catch-all description of what is a combination of complex, fluctuating cultural processes and realities, is no longer appropriate for theologians. "Culture" is an inaccurate, vague, and inhibiting term.[597] Something of this is reflected in the language of the Confession of Belhar in its radical rejection of any doctrine that seeks to divide and exclude on the ground of "descent or any other human or social factor."[598] Language that binds individuals and groups to others' notions of what that language constitutes is often colonial and paternalistic: individuals, groups, and even nations learn to view themselves only through the eyes of the powerful.[599]

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[594] For example, this is a fitting description for Strange's narrative of "cosmic culture clash" in which Christians are "on the winning side." Strange, *Plugged In*, 51.

[595] Aguilar explains that European cultural anthropology emerged through colonialism and involved essentializing "natives and their shared meanings." Aguilar, "Changing models," 305-6.

[596] For example, we cannot simply say that an individual "belongs to a British or American culture" because that says nothing about the way that individual experiences "complex social realities." Aguilar, "Changing Models," 307.

[597] This is a development within cultural anthropology, not specifically in theology. However, Aguilar suggests that developments in anthropology should be taken into consideration wherever anthropology is used in biblical studies. By extension, if theology wants to talk about "culture" it seems reasonable to expect the same consideration in theological cultural engagement. See e.g., Aguilar, "Changing Models," 308.

[598] "The Confession of Belhar."

[599] For example, what does it mean to be African when Africans see themselves only through eyes of a non-African world? Paris, "The African and African-American Understanding of Our Common Humanity," 276.

If the word “culture” fails to truly represent the cultural realities experienced by an individual it is because of the boundaries it places around that individual. Aguilar explains that there are dangers when “culture” is used to equate “bounded cultures with bounded rights and cultures with nation, ethnicity and statehood.”[600] Aguilar associates this danger with genocidal crises such as the Holocaust, the Balkans war, and the Rwandan civil conflict: binding “cultures” particularly to territories and ethnic groups can trigger catastrophic power relationships.[601] From Aguilar’s description it is clear that the move away from using “culture” in the traditional way in anthropology demonstrates a commitment to find new, better ways of describing cultural communities and the cultural processes they and their members experience so that the cultural clashes and crises mentioned above can be minimized.

4.4.5 The priority of “the other” in cultural anthropology

If anthropologists are committed to such a cause in their cultural analysis, then theologians ought to follow suit. From the cultural anthropological developments already reviewed in this chapter it is clear that abandoning the word “culture” does not mean abandoning the idea of cultural expression, cultural development, and all manner of cultural realities. A greater understanding of how the world operates from a human perspective comes through cultural anthropology.[602] The practice of “participant observation” creates the opportunity for a “personal encounter” with “the other” in different cultural contexts.[603] This encounter with “the other” and their cultural realities provides a foundation for fairer and more ethical attitudes and relationship as the emphasis moves away from difference towards interrelatedness.[604] Cultural processes are significant in providing opportunities for interaction which benefit many groups in society and which lead to a greater understanding of how “the other” experiences those processes.

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[600] Aguilar cites Brian Barry, Terry Eagleton, and Adam Kuper in his explanation of “culture” and “trans-national uses of such terms.” Aguilar, “Changing Models,” 308.

[601] This happens when “other culture” are “perceived as foreign, inadequate, dangerous and subject to scrutiny.” Aguilar, “Changing Models,” 308.

[602] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 35.

[603] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 43-44.

[604] See e.g., Clifford, “Introduction,” 10 and Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 46.

That “the other” is a priority for cultural anthropology can be seen in the following statement from Jack Eller. In his closing sentences of the final section of *Cultural Anthropology* Eller describes how cultural anthropology is essentially about difference:

> Anthropologists ... share news from other worlds with members of their own and every other society. And this is not the only way that people encounter “difference”: in their own everyday lives, they are faced with humans of differing languages, religions, values, and bodies. Human diversity, the reality of “difference,” follows them home. [605]

Difference is at the heart of diversity, and it is this difference which makes cultural realities complex and undefinable. Difference prioritises “the other” in our cultural engagements and difference makes us “the other” on an equal footing, with no cultural superiority. As Lawrence writes: “Understanding “the other” involves crossing boundaries – whether spatial, familial, ethnic, cultural, spiritual or social.”[606] Difference implies a sense of “otherness”.

4.4.6 “Otherness” in anthropology and theology

In 2006 anthropologist Joel Robbins wrote an essay on the “awkward relationship” between theology and anthropology. In that essay he described the difference between anthropologists and theologians in terms of how they deal with other ways to live. Robbins explores whether there is potential in the relationship between theology and anthropology to lead to a change in the way anthropologists approach their own discipline.[607] His focus is on otherness;[608] anthropologists suggest and collect data about other ways in which to live but what they find harder to do is suggest how this should make a difference in people’s lives, whereas theologians focus on how to be transformed in order to

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[605] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 390.

[606] Lawrence refers the reader to Russell McCutcheon’s work on “otherness”. Lawrence, “Introduction,” 9.

[607] Robbins begins by considering two approaches to the relationship between theology and anthropology: firstly, by examining the role of theology in the formation of anthropology, and secondly, by understanding theology as data about the specific cultural setting in which it was formed. Neither approach views theology as having any power to transform anthropology. Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology,” 287.

[608] In the context of this article Robbins is borrowing the word “otherness” from theologian John Milbank. It has been used already in this chapter in anthropological terms and Milbank uses it himself in terms of social anthropology. See e.g., Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology,” 289.

live differently.[609] His argument is built on theologian John Milbank's contrast between an "ontology of violence" of social thought and an ontology of "peace" of Christianity.[610] Robbins' suggestion is that anthropologists need to allow an interaction with theology to promote the discovery of "real otherness in the world," rather than converting to Christianity, and to find hope in the world without God.[611]

I include this in this chapter because it demonstrates a different view of the relationship between anthropology and theology. So far, the emphasis has been on what theology can learn from anthropology in terms of how "culture" is to be understood and approached. Instead, Robbins uses theology as a lens through which to view anthropological views of "radical otherness."[612] Theology demonstrates that "otherness" is a quality valued in social thought, and anthropologists need to recover it.[613] Robbins returns to this line of argument in a further article published in the Australian Journal of Anthropology more than six years later, in which he continues to call for anthropological otherness. In this article he admits that theology or theologies (not necessarily Christian) may have a larger role to play in the manifestation of radical otherness, not least through the anthropologist taking on the belief systems of "the other" with whom they are engaged.[614] This application of "otherness" is also seen within ecumenical encounters in the Christian faith, encounters which are often characterised by conflict.[615] Robbins suggests that there are a variety of ways in

[609] Robbins calls this "the critical force of theology" that mocks anthropology by its confidence that an awareness of a different way to live can lead to transformation. Robbins, "Anthropology," 288.

[610] With reference to Millbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, Robbins concludes that anthropologists ought to learn from a Christian ontology of peace: "[A]t the core of such an ontology are practices of charity and reconciliation among people who see themselves as connected in a larger whole oriented by the value of salvation." Robbins, 291-292.

[611] Robbins compares the manifestations of such peace as reconciliation and charity amongst people who are connected by an idea of salvation with anthropological ideas of exchanges between interrelated and interconnected peoples. He stops short of adopting theological concepts that presuppose the existence of God and the work of Christ that sustains the Christian ontology of peace. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 293.

[612] Robbins refers to the hangover of traditional anthropological methods that means that contemporary anthropology "is not a discipline much given to finding radical otherness in the world or to using that otherness as a basis for hope." Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 292.

[613] Again, Robbin wants this pursuit to be without reference to the existence of God. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 293.

[614] Robbins cites anthropologist Malcolm Haddon's proselytization of the Hare Krishna religion as an example. Joel Robbins, "Afterword: let's keep it awkward: anthropology, theology, and otherness," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24, (2013): 333.

[615] Robbins suggests that a study of ecumenism could prosper anthropology's growth in the area of "otherness". Robbins, "Afterword," 335.

which “otherness” may be realised in anthropological terms and therefore studying that “otherness” in multiple contexts will help anthropologists continue to recover the idea.[616]

4.4.7 Post-cultural ethnography

This idea of “otherness” is bound up with the reality of cultural complexities for individuals and communities, and the subsequent indefinability of “culture.” It is a consequence of the deconstruction of the meaning of “culture” which has led to post-colonial and post-cultural ethnography.[617] In his article, “Is the Future Beyond Culture?” Robbins reviews the work of two anthropologists and their ethnographic work with Pacific peoples, Jeffrey Sissons and Will Rollason. In particular, Robbins refers to Will Rollason’s analysis of anthropological views of how Pacific people construct their futures. Robbins concludes that Rollason’s work pushes anthropologists to consider how they might work beyond the boundaries of cultural patterns of the past in giving accounts of specific futures.[618]

4.4.8 Different, possible, futures

Post-cultural ethnography is the issue in Rollason’s *Pacific Futures*, summed up in the following extract from his opening paragraph:

> The contributions to this book are devoted to demonstrating how the activities of Pacific Islanders can be better understood by analysing the future as a field of possibility, action and hopes. We envisage this future as an alternative or creative supplement to interpretations and explanations framed as cultural or social – a positioning which, as I argue in this introductory essay, serves only to locate people in the past.[619]

From this statement it is clear that for the ethnographic studies carried out by Rollason and his contemporaries the priority is the actions of Pacific peoples in

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[616] Robbins raises many questions in this article, not least whether there are different versions of “otherness” that might be applied in ethnography. See e.g., Robbins, “Afterword,” 334.

[617] This results in what Robbins refers to as “an understanding of the future as always possibly in some ways beyond or after or ahead of culture.” Robbins, “Is the Future Beyond Culture?” 708.

[618] Cultural analysis is still valuable as long as it does not bind people to the cultural traditions of the past instead of faithfully accounting the futures of people as they imagine them. Robbins, “Is the Future Beyond Culture,” 709.

[619] Rollason, “Introduction,” 1.

the present that are directed forwards to secure their futures. For Rollason ethnography must focus on these futures as envisioned by Pacific peoples, rather than on the futures that have been constructed by anthropologists based on cultural patterns which are rooted in the past.[620] This is what makes Rollason's anthropology post-cultural. However, it is also a good example of post-colonial ethnography that prioritises "the other." Rollason explains that traditionally the way that Pacific peoples envision their own futures have been misrepresented: this is because either anthropologists have projected "their own versions of the future" or they have assumed a future for Pacific peoples based upon the past.[621] A key issue here is that the life of Pacific peoples is seen as radically different to the "civilisation" of Western modernity.[622] Instead, "the other" of Pacific peoples needs to be viewed on their own terms, and within the context of societies built on systems of relationships, known in anthropology as "gift economies."[623]

This key issue leads to a dismissal of specificity: modern assumptions of how futures should be shaped ignore the specific aspirations and present projects of Pacific peoples as they direct their efforts towards their futures.[624] Not only is this an example of post-colonial, and post-cultural anthropology but it also tends towards post-development, where indigenous peoples are liberated to autonomously construct their own futures.[625] However, this is so that the specific needs and wants and hopes for specific members of specific societies can be taken into consideration and better reflected ethnographically. Specificity

[620] Rollason explains that there are two questions which anthropologists should be asking. These are: "how do Pacific people imagine the future; and how are they acting today to shape their lives tomorrow?" Rollason, "Introduction," 2.

[621] These versions of the future come "from a perspective of development and governance" which projects a particular view. This view, grown from Modernity, expects that all successful futures will look similar: this is the problem with the concepts of "developed" and "underdeveloped." Rollason, "Introduction," 2-3.

[622] Futures are compared to "the good life" of "the global North," which is based on capitalism and consumerism. Rollason, "Introduction," 3.

[623] These operate by different rules than consumerist, capitalist societies. Rollason explains that because this is how Pacific peoples function they do not envision their futures in terms of economic growth and development. Rollason, "Introduction," 3.

[624] This is because "consumer societies of the global North" is "the norm" in development discourses, and those who are poor (in any way which is defined by the North's assumptions) are lacking. What they need to secure to develop their futures is Western development. Again, this is a Modern, colonial view of indigenous peoples. Rollason, "Introduction," 4.

[625] Rollason writes, "If this is to be achieved, we need to foreground what local people actually want, what they are trying to do to get it, and why it makes sense." Rollason, "Introduction," 4.

is a natural consequence of developing awareness of “the other” and a sense of “otherness”. The same is true when it comes to the tools of cultural relativism deployed by anthropologists working in the Pacific.[626] Rollason is succinct in the following explanatory statement: “Just because you can interpret what someone does in terms of the past and a cultural tradition doesn’t mean that you must do so.”[627] To do so removes specificity from the possible imagined futures of indigenous peoples.

4.4.9 The complexity of post-cultural ethnography

Rollason is constructing a methodology that challenges traditional anthropological frames of reference: he writes that “future is critical” because it demands that anthropologists recognise that change means change.[628] This methodology disengages Pacific peoples from their cultural traditions, setting them free from simply reproducing those cultural idioms albeit in different ways in the future. Rollason compares this disengagement to engaging with “the other” because it involves the objective distancing from the self as described by Davies.[629] This methodology is not straightforward as the following statement suggests:

> A central problem lies in the relationship between faithfulness to the meaning of specific projects – issues of translation and interpretation – and to their form and content. Understanding specific projects in context inevitably risks subjecting them to the authority of that context. However, this problem simply underscores the need for ethnographic engagement, for studies which are sufficiently sensitive to trace the synergies and connections that have the capacity to displace any final cultural

[626] Rollason explains that, in fact, anthropologists have tried to guard against modernist ideas of uniformity by giving accounts of how indigenous people interpret their surroundings, their systems of belief, their personhoods, and their relationships. However, because this involves interpreting any change to indigenous people through the lens of past cultural traditions, it still serves to bind those peoples to the anthropologists view of them. This is cultural relativism. Rollason, “Introduction,” 6-8.

[627] This is in reference to anthropologist Mark Mosko’s account of Melanesians interpreting change and innovation in the light of their past, which makes it impossible for real transformation to take place. Rollason, “Introduction,” 7-8.

[628] Rollason uses the examples of playing football and becoming Pentecostal Christians: that these “projects” actually make a difference to the lives of Pacific peoples. They are not made immediately defunct by Pacific peoples only interpreting those activities in light of the past. Rollason, “Introduction,” 8.

[629] It requires a breaking out of the bonds of cultural traditions by which the self is identified. Rollason, “Introduction,” 11.

> grid. Such an engagement lies squarely within the long-standing commitments of the discipline.[630]

There is not the scope in this chapter to explore the complexity of Rollason's methodology and the focus of this section has been to glimpse post-cultural, other-centred ethnography in practice. The above statement returns this chapter to its aim in using anthropology as a lens through which to critically evaluate and understand theological cultural engagement. These are exactly the tools that theology requires in order to faithfully reflect the cultural contexts with which it desires to engage. Rollason's statement captures the vital need for an acknowledgment of cultural complexity, for a priority of "the other," "otherness", and the specificity of the futures that other people in other cultural contexts imagine for themselves. It captures the vital need for theological cultural engagement to consider how often it simply posits modernist, colonial, notions of what constitutes a good life in the global North. The complexity of anthropological accounts in *Pacific Futures* and the post-colonial discourses undertaken by Pacific peoples and their communities at the very least demands that any theological engagement takes place with a priority on "the other" in their own right.[631]

4.5 Conclusion: Towards a Post-Cultural Theological Cultural Engagement

In this chapter I have explored contemporary issues surrounding the meaning of "culture" from within the field of cultural anthropology. The reason for this exploration is to lay the foundation for a dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism to enrich the renewal of Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. Rather than pursuing a definitive explanation of "culture" for the sake of theological cultural engagement, this chapter has offered the idea of

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[630] Rollason affirms his commitment to ethnographic tools in that it is only by employing these tools that the futures imagined by Pacific peoples can be successfully captured. Rollason, "Introduction," 13-14.

[631] *Pacific Futures* presents challenging accounts of post-colonial and post-cultural anthropology among Pacific peoples. For example, anthropologist Courtney Handman describes the "Lost Tribes discourses" of Pacific peoples which is a pursuit of unity through a critique of their self-understanding as a lost Israelite tribe and the potential for future transformation through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Some of this pursuit is an attempt to avoid the colonial discourses of both development and diversity. Even a commitment to celebrating diversity in theological cultural engagement needs to be approached with care from this perspective. Courtney Handman, "The Future of Christian Critique: Lost Tribes Discourses in Papua New Guinean Publics," in *Pacific Futures: Projects, Politics, and Interests*, ed. Will Rollason (Oxford, New York: Berghan Books, 2014), 127, https://0-www-jstor-org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt9qd15t.

cultural complexity through the issues of “writing culture,” self-awareness, the place of “the other,” and post-cultural ethnography.

“Culture” is rarely homogeneous, often syncretistic, and not easily divisible into empirical facts. “Culture” consists of rapidly changing processes influencing human beings as they build their societies, and integral to the ways in which societies are organized, modified, developed and changed. Cultural processes are observable but cannot be pinned down, controlled, or interpreted in a complete and exhaustive way. Many cultural identities may be expressed at any one time by a single cultural context in relationship with other cultural contexts, and these identities may be observed most often in the form of rituals, practices, behaviours, systems of governance (including laws) and the production of artistic artefacts.

4.5.1 Four implications for theological cultural engagement

From a cultural anthropological perspective, the task of engaging theologically with cultural processes is far from simple because “culture” cannot be viewed as static and unchanging but as a dialogical and dynamic process.[632] Therefore one anthropological implication from this brief analysis of cultural anthropological concerns is that defining “culture” is impossible: the processes, interactions, systems of meaning, and structures of beliefs that appear to constitute “culture” are in fact too complex and too much in flux to pin down to an objective definition. This is exacerbated by the ethnographer’s influence on cultural analysis. Therefore, one of the first questions for theologians must concern the presuppositions they bring to cultural analysis that will influence their theological engagement. This does not necessarily preclude a presuppositional, Reformational, Kuyperian worldview: it means that self-awareness is key.

A second implication is that cultural engagement will require multiple perspectives at once, to take into consideration the complexity of cultural relationships. This will involve understanding the difference between cultural

[632] See e.g., James Clifford, “Introduction,” 13-14.

development and cultural change.[633] It will also require an understanding that an individual may be part of many different cultural communities at the same time, influencing and being influenced by multiple interactions and relationships within and across those communities, and therefore effecting continual change. Therefore, a second question must concern the approaches that theologians take in their cultural analysis, and a commitment to taking account of the diverse cultural contexts of the specific cultural phenomena with which they wish to engage. This is already present in Kuyperianism, and moreover in the work of theologians like Mouw, Botman, and Chaplin as they grapple with civility, post-apartheid South Africa, and institutional pluralism.

A third implication is the consideration of "the other" in cultural analysis and an application of the idea of "otherness" that is already present in Christian theology.[634] This leads to a reflection on whether theological cultural engagement is post-colonial and post-cultural or whether it ties cultural communities and members of those communities to cultural traditions through colonial notions of development and cultural superiority. Therefore, a question for theologians is whether their cultural analysis offers the possibility of members of cultural communities acting in specific ways to construct their cultural futures with a view towards transformation and change. A Kuyperian emphasis on social justice is important here: a concern for "the other" is an imperative to raise the profile of theologies which address racial, economic, gender, and social inequalities.

A fourth implication is that views of cultural *development* may be influenced by a particular theology of creation, which will affect cultural analysis and engagement, and add further layers to cultural complexity. However, a particular theology of creation, and of the future of cultural development, can provide the context for the possibility for new futures of change and transformation. Therefore, a question for theologians concerns the role that a positive view of creation and an understanding of the goal of cultural development plays in their cultural analysis. Bringing this dimension into

[633] Change implies the continual fluctuating exchanges between cultural groups (see e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 369), whereas cultural development implies an end goal, such as may be found in neo-Calvinist theology (see e.g., Kuyper, *Lectures*, 26).

[634] This "otherness" Robbins wishes to extract from Christian theology and claim for anthropology without its Christian overtone. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 293.

theological cultural engagement suggests that such analysis can be post-cultural in character. This is especially pertinent for a theological movement that is committed to cultural renewal and an eschatological hope in the final redemption of creation through Christ.

These four implications drawn from a survey of the contemporary debates regarding the meaning of “culture” from within cultural anthropology deliberately reflect the themes outlined in the previous chapters and at the start of this chapter. They reflect the priorities of neo-Calvinism described in chapters one and two, and the priorities of cultural anthropology discussed in this chapter. They also will form the basis of a constructed dialogue between the two disciplines which will be developed in the following chapter.

4.5.2 Why co-operation is necessary

From the vital issues surrounding the meaning of “culture” discussed in this chapter it is clear that cooperation between the fields of cultural anthropology and theology is necessary. This is so that any ethnographic account by theologians in the Reformed tradition may not betray cultural complexity, or the communities with which it engages, by seeking to construct a definitive body of knowledge. Instead, theologians need to undertake the more difficult task of evoking cultural contexts and using multiple perspectives to do so. Cultural anthropology enables theologians to avoid viewing cultural processes, whether they are cultural expression, manifestations, practices, or ideologies, as external, or “out there” and from using the yardstick of Reformed, or even neo-Calvinist theological doctrine, which is internal, or “in here” to measure their validity. Instead, theologians must realize that they and their ideologies and doctrines are subject to the same cultural dynamism and cultural processes that influence all societies and groups of humans. A co-operation between anthropology and neo-Calvinism provides the lens through which a multiplicity of perspectives can be viewed and leads theological cultural analysis into appropriating more than one approach.

4.5.3 A positive view of diverging worldviews

Robbins’ raises a question about the relationship between anthropology and theology that addresses the extent of change and transformation that may

happen as a result of interaction, collaboration, and dialogue between the two disciplines. The difference Robbins is emphasising here, albeit implicitly, is a difference in worldview. How far can collaboration be pursued between disciplines which hold such diverging worldviews? However, as outlined above, if that divergence can produce something creative and new (e.g., a sense of otherness in anthropology for Robbins, or a better understanding of "the other" in theology for Lawrence) then such collaboration ought to be welcomed.[635] This thesis is looking for a change in the thought and practice of theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition through this kind of dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology not with a view to convert either to the other's worldview but the with the aim of constructing something new from the knowledge gained from both.

4.5.4 A multiperspectival approach

My task in this chapter has been to "grapple toward and construct" a multiperspectival approach to cultural analysis which is in dialogue with the field of cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinist theology.[636] By the nature of cultural dynamism this multiperspectivity will be subject to change and modification which is why dialogue must remain open. The future of cultural contexts, identities, and movements is unknown, but given the nature of cultural flux it is sure to be "one emerging from multiple and contradictory forces and one to which anthropology [and theology] has something to contribute as observer and participant."[637] This thesis is concerned with discovering the extent to which Reformed theology, and neo-Calvinism in particular, can contribute to the cultural development of the future, and what form that contribution will take.

Theology has much to bring to the dialogue with cultural anthropology. Reformed theology, and neo-Calvinist theology in particular is rich in doctrines of creation, of humanity, of redemption and of the future of both humanity and the created order. As mentioned above, there is the potential within the theology

[635] This is also outlined in the Introduction to the thesis in being a crucial part of interdisciplinary research. The fact that conflict between these two disciplines exists leads to methodological pluralism, which in turn leads to a greater collaboration and a deeper engagement. Pahl and Facer, ""Understanding Collaborative Research Practices – a Lexicon," 218.

[636] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 378.

[637] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 388 (insert mine).

of neo-Calvinism for cultural engagement to be post-cultural in character. A commitment to the idea of common grace, the potential for cultural diversity and development in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, and an eschatological hope in the future of cultural development all combine to offer the possibility of imagining cultural futures of transformation. To do this, theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition must avoid falling into essentialist, colonial notions of development, where ethnocentrism and cultural superiority become the hallmarks of cultural analysis. Then, theological cultural engagement has the potential to release communities and individuals from developing in a way which ties them to cultural traditions of the past, and from inequalities and injustices caused by colonial, paternalistic boundaries. Neo-Calvinism offers the possibility that change means change. Because of this, there is the possibility that theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition can be a kind of post-cultural ethnographic project. With an emphasis on self-awareness and self-consciousness on the part of the theologian and anthropologist as ethnographers, the cooperation between both disciplines can only lead to a richer, more vibrant evocation of dynamic cultural processes.

Chapter Five: Approaching the Cultural "Other" Through A Civil Dialogue Between Neo-Calvinism and Cultural Anthropology

5.1 Introduction: Why Dialogue?

This thesis is concerned with whether it is possible to develop a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition that takes seriously complex cultural realities. In Chapter One I explained the inspiration for using dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology; inspiration which is drawn from both disciplines. In the first instance, the idea of a civil dialogue is located in the neo-Kuyperian work of Richard Mouw in the area of forming intra and inter religious dialogue.[638] In the second instance, the idea of "a co-operatively evolved text" formed from "fragments of discourse" is located in the writing of anthropologist Stephen Tyler.[639] This chapter is concerned with the development of that dialogue and to do this I will draw together the diverse voices in neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology that have already contributed to the literature reviews in this thesis. This chapter serves two functions: it is both the culmination of the previous chapters and a demonstration of engagement between two distinct, complex, cultural "others". This will involve a certain degree of recapitulation of issues raised so far from within both disciplines, but in bringing those issues together co-operatively my purpose is to elucidate how theological cultural engagement might be informed, transformed, and renewed in its approach to the complex, cultural other.

5.1.1 A dialogical method

In this introductory section I will demonstrate how I am applying Mouw's description of "civil dialogue" and Tyler's idea of "a co-operatively evolved text" through the bringing together of the priorities and concerns of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology articulated in the previous chapters. This will be

[638] Mouw describes intrafaith dialogue as being between him and those with a "shared Christian faith." However, he also explains that some of his contact with different kinds of faith communities (actually been a mix of intra and inter." This is because he has found a point of contact; for example, in a shared relationship to Abraham with Jews and Muslims. Mouw, *Adventures*, 179.

[639] Tyler is describing the ethnographic process in this quote, not the development of theological cultural engagement. However, my aim is to appropriate the spirit of the idea of "a co-operatively evolved text" to demonstrate a commitment to a genuine and meaningful dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology with the view of evoking a sense of the change that is needed in cultural engagement. Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125.

followed by an example of a dialogical method from interdisciplinary research which offers a further methodological rubric for a thesis that draws together priorities from two divergent disciplines. To effect the application of dialogue from Mouw and Tyler, and using the ethos of interdisciplinary dialogical method, the main body of this chapter will be given over to creating a co-operative of voices from both disciplines in dialogue concerning the following relevant points as raised in Chapter One: 1) Cultural analysis requires an acknowledgment that "culture" is both meaningful and undefinable; 2) Because "culture" is complex and requires multiple perspectives, theological cultural engagement must be contextual in nature, while remaining faithful to the tradition; 3) Theological cultural engagement that is founded upon a positive view of creation gives cultural works and human cultural development meaning and a future purpose. Part of the aim of this chapter is to expand previous understandings of "culture" to embrace complexity in a way which changes Christian cultural engagement in terms of approaching the cultural other. In this chapter I will demonstrate that this is possible via a dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism; the following chapter will focus on changes in practice which will lead to a renewal of cultural engagement.

5.1.2 Civil dialogue in neo-Calvinism

Mouw's commitment to public civility is an outworking of the Kuyperian pursuit of living the Christian faith publicly in every sphere of life.[640] For Mouw, this means learning to speak civilly, to listen empathetically, and to engage in dialogue meaningfully while remaining convicted of the uniqueness of the claims of Jesus Christ.[641] For civil dialogue to happen Christians need to cultivate empathy with their fellow human beings, curiosity about what they think, feel, believe, and how that affects the way they live, and teachability even in conversation with those who hold very different views to their own.[642]

[640] Mouw writes: "Civility is public politeness. It means that we display tact, moderation, refinement and good manners toward people who are different from us." These characteristics reflect the kind of character Christians are supposed to have anyway. Mouw, *Common Decency*, 13-14.

[641] Mouw admits that this balance is not easy: "Convicted civility is something we have to work at. We have to work at it because both sides of the equation are very important. Civility is important. And so is conviction." Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 17.

[642] Mouw refers to empathy, curiosity, and teachability as being characteristics of "open hearts towards others" and it is possible to develop them consistently only through "the

Empathy is key here: Mouw describes empathy as “experiencing the feelings and concerns of others as if they were your own.”[643] It is not enough to empathise with those to whom we are attracted, or who are like us in some way: empathy means stepping into the shoes of those who are different to us.

5.1.3 Evangelism by the back door?

An objection to this kind of dialogue may be that it is being used to sneak in evangelism by the back door. Dialogue with others should not simply be a one-way process with the sole intention of evangelism, but an opportunity for growth in self-understanding on all sides.[644] This is not to say that introducing others to Christ or being open about the unique claims of Christianity are necessarily and intentionally omitted from dialogue. Mouw makes it clear that he wants to avoid the polarization between an intentionally evangelistic dialogue that relies on dogma and theology and a dialogue that relies on relativism and is mute about Christ. He writes: “I want an evangelizing Christianity that is open to civil dialogue with non-Christians. So I look for ways of transcending these polarized positions. There is much to be gained from holding firmly to Christian truth claims while genuinely engaging other people in serious discussion.”[645] Mouw’s Kuyperian roots are obvious here: his interest lies in preserving the integrity of different spheres as they interact with each other, and the integrity of differing individuals even as “a serious discussion” between them promotes their commonness.

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reinforcing experiences of divine grace.” This is what makes this kind of civility uniquely Christian. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 65.

[643] Mouw, *Adventures*, 186. He is careful to precede this statement with a description of how one can be sure that empathy is an authentic expression of someone else’s feelings.

[644] Mouw refers to the work of missionary Stephen Neill, who engaged with Indian Hindus by stepping inside their religion in order to better understand which kinds of questions they have about life. This is with an explicit view to demonstrating that Hinduism cannot provide those answers; only Jesus Christ can. Similar to Strange’s and Turnau’s subversive fulfilment approaches, Mouw suggests two caveats to this kind of dialogue: firstly, that self-understanding happens both ways, and secondly, that the emphasis should be on Hinduism falling short of answering their questions instead of absolutizing its insufficiency. Mouw, *Adventures*, 181-183.

[645] For Mouw, evangelism and dialogue are not polar opposites but “complementary” activities. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 113, 115.

5.1.4 A "serious discussion" between neo-Calvinist and cultural anthropological voices

In keeping with Mouw's ethos above, it is this Kuyperian influence that makes it possible to have a "serious discussion" about cultural engagement that involves both neo-Calvinist and cultural anthropological voices, that transcends the "polarized positions" of the different starting points of cultural anthropology and theology, and remains faithful to the "truth positions" of neo-Calvinism.[646] Drawing on Mouw's descriptions of "civil dialogue", of empathy, of self-understanding, and "a spirit of genuine learning" these different starting points should not preclude a dialogue between the two disciplines.[647] An appropriation of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty both at a sphere level and an individual level makes genuine dialogue possible. In addition, a shared humanity and commonness also makes genuine dialogue possible between two different disciplines; rooted firmly in the neo-Calvinist tradition, a shared humanity and what Mouw calls "a common createdness."[648] The upholding of commonness alongside distinctiveness through genuine dialogue makes co-operation possible, and means that a change in practice resulting from such co-operation is achievable.[649]

5.1.5 From dialogue to "a co-operatively evolved text"

In the examples above from Mouw's dialogical work with members of other faiths, dialogue has usually taken place in the same physical space as those engaging in the dialogue. In contrast, this thesis offers a dialogue that is based on a textual representation of the priorities coming from neo-Calvinist and

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[646] As Davies suggests, the primary difference lies in belief – or lack of it – in the existence of God, and how that belief – or lack of it – shape the pursuits and conclusions of both disciplines. Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 1.

[647] Mouw is specifically referring to interreligious dialogue. I am extending the meaning of his words to cover this dialogue between two disciplines with differing worldviews and systems of operation, similar to that of interreligious discussions. Mouw, *Adventures*, 186.

[648] There is no need to use explicitly theological language when co-operating with a different belief system to produce an outcome. Mouw uses the example of "a discussion with a Muslim and a secular liberal about a key question concerning the rights of undocumented immigrants to the United States." In this discussion, theological or specifically Christian language is avoided, and instead the discussion centres around shared values and behaviours: fairness, respect, and compassion. This is an example of dialogue based on "created commonness." Mouw, *Adventures*, 78-79.

[649] Mouw refers to another Christian thinker, Francis Schaeffer, who used the phrase ""co-belligerancy"" to describe how different faith groups might work together to in activities for the common good. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 114-115.

cultural anthropological voices. This is similar to Tyler's description of ethnography as text that has evolved through the co-operation of different voices and "fragments of discourse".[650] Forming a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology is an intertextual activity that is designed to evoke an integration of ideas and priorities from both. This will rely somewhat on the imagination as Tyler suggests in his reference to "fantasy," because I am attempting to achieve a dialogue in text that is similar to a dialogue in speech.[651] The evocation of integrated voices that emerges from the textual dialogue will develop into a new dynamic for theological cultural engagement which will be explored in the following chapter.

5.1.6 Dialogue and interdisciplinary research

A civil dialogue, "a serious discussion", and "a co-operatively evolved text" demonstrate that the idea of bringing the voices of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology together in dialogue are rooted in both disciplines. Nevertheless, there is a further paradigm which is helpful to explore with regard to methodology: this is a dialogical model that is located in the field of interdisciplinary research. As explained in the Introduction to the thesis, the aim of interdisciplinary research is to produce an integrated body of knowledge which is intended to change current practice in some transformative way.[652] Communication and collaboration, conflict and commonness are features of interdisciplinary research and each feature works towards the goal of producing a shared knowledge.[653] Each of these features will be in evidence in the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology to show the usefulness of this method in tackling questions that are too complex to be answered by one discipline alone. An interdisciplinary dialogical method is an appropriate paradigm to use to reflect on Mouw's dialogical activity and Tyler's co-operatively text. This is because it integrates knowledge generated from two

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[650] Tyler, "Post-modern ethnography," 125.

[651] It is this that makes ethnography akin to poetry. Clifford expresses how, in moving away from ethnography as being mainly about what one observes, "cultural poetics" have taken precedence: "an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances." Clifford, "Introduction," 12.

[652] For a brief overview of these definitions see e.g., Klein, "Communication and Collaboration in Interdisciplinary Research," 3.

[653] Klein makes the point that interdisciplinary research is imperative in the addressing of complex issues that need more than one viewpoint, particularly when that develops relationship between academics and practitioners. Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinary History, Theory, and Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 11.

distinct and, at times, contradictory disciplines about this specific and complex problem.[654]

5.1.7 An interdisciplinary dialogical method

An interdisciplinary dialogical method that will aid the textual dialogue in this chapter is found in the research process of Marie-José Avenier, who is Director of CNRS Research at the CERAG Research Center in Grenoble, specializing in interdisciplinary research methods. The original model is designed to aid the construction of research questions through collaboration between at least two dialogue speakers and consists of a five-step method which seeks to close the gap between academic value and good practice.[655] The method requires both a recognition of the complexity of interactions and interrelations between subjects and a recognition of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of those different subjects.[656] This is especially appropriate for a dialogue which is rooted in the idea of sphere sovereignty (maintaining distinctiveness) and informed by the cultural complexities voiced by cultural anthropologists.[657]

5.1.8 Difference and language

In this thesis the use of dialogue provides an appropriate and clear way forward with the aim of developing a new dynamic for the practice of theological cultural engagement. [658] Because of this, it is no problem that neo-Calvinism and

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[654] For example, a main contradiction is worldview: the Reformed theological tradition is by nature ideological and rooted in the beliefs that God is sovereign over all things, that sin exists and may be considered the root cause of evil, that humans need saving, and that the end of time is a reality. Cultural anthropology as a discipline would not hold to such a worldview (even if individual anthropologists may) but would bring religion into the realm of observable human behaviour. Jack Eller describes the anthropological study of religion as one which is harder to determine but still able to be measured as part of the cultural context of a particular religion. See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 237.

[655] Marie-José Avenier and Aura Parmentier Cajaiba, "The Dialogical Model: Developing Academic Knowledge for and from Practice," *European Management Review* 9, no. 4 (2012): 201, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1740-4762.2012.01038.x.

[656] In Avenier's words, it must hold in tension the intentions and knowledge bases of "antagonistic and yet complementary stakes." Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, "The Dialogical Model," 201.

[657] Avenier's dialogical method was originally framed in the context of developing research questions which would hold value for academics and practitioners by addressing the gap between research and practice, a collaboration known as "engaged scholarship." Parmentier Cajaiba and Avenier describe the function of the dialogical model in indicating "ways to specify a research question so that the resulting answer has a better chance of insightfully illuminating practice." Avenier and Parmentier Cajaiba, "The Dialogical Model," 201.

[658] Organizational Complexity scholars, Lorino, Tricard, and Clot consider dialogues as vital to the narrative of collaboration; as aiming at building "something new together, in quest of

cultural anthropology have different starting points, or that the voices within the disciplines hold different views.[659] In fact, this difference can lead to a "productive divergence" and is as valuable to the dialogue as agreement.[660] Given that difference exists between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology it is important to highlight the use of language that will be employed in the dialogue between the two disciplines.[661] Language has been at the heart of previous collaborations between the broad disciplines of theology and anthropology, demanding that the meaning of words and phrases are not taken for granted and are not used as blunt instruments for cultural descriptions.[662] A prime example of this is how "the other" is viewed in both anthropology and in theological cultural engagement, and whether the language employed in describing "the other" betrays cultural superiority or ethnocentrism.[663] Because language is crucial to upholding the distinctiveness of "the other", including "the other" of anthropology and "the other" of neo-Calvinism, I will continue to use subject-specific vocabulary in a way which shares the meaning of that vocabulary across the disciplines.

5.2 Neo-Calvinism and Cultural Anthropology in Dialogue

As explained above the textual dialogue that follows focuses on the three themes that have been highlighted throughout this thesis. Firstly, I will address the problem of defining "culture" by describing the ways in which neo-Calvinist

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purpose." Philippe Lorino, Benoît Tricard, and Yves Clot, "Research Methods for Non-Representational Approaches to Organizational Complexity: The Dialogical Mediated Inquiry," *Organization Studies* 32, no. 6 (2011): 795.

[659] Difference can lead to a "both…and" outcome in dialogue. For example, scientist Karen Barad emphasises a "both…and" aspect in her interdisciplinary research into the relationship between quantum physics and ethics. This is because quantum theory leads research away from either absolutism or relativism and allows Barad to explore complex layers of ontology, epistemology, and ethics while avoiding reductionism. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007), 18, 25.

[660] "Productive divergence" is one of eight terms used in describing collaborative practices in interdisciplinary research. Pahl and Facer, "Understanding Collaborative Research Practices," 217.

[661] Klein draws attention to the importance of language studies in interdisciplinary research in order to overcome the gaps between the worldviews of collaborators. Klein, "Communication and Collaboration," 6.

[662] This demonstrates the importance of Lawrence's description of anthropology enabling theology to see "the other" rightly, as distinctive and specific. Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[663] Haridimos Tsoukas, a professor in organization studies, writes, "there is no privileged position from which reality might objectively be viewed." Haridimos Tsoukas, "Don't Simplify, Complexify: From Disjunctive to Conjunctive Theorizing in Organization and Management Studies," *Journal of Management Studies* 54, no. 2 (2017): 19.

theologians talk about “culture” in light of the issues raised by cultural anthropologists concerning the definition of “culture.” Following this section, I will discuss the subsequent need for a multiperspectival approach to theological cultural engagement; an approach which takes seriously the complex and diverse cultural contexts experienced by the cultural other. This will also draw on knowledge and priorities raised by both neo-Calvinist and cultural anthropological voices. Finally, I will highlight the impact of a positive view of human cultural activity may have on theological cultural engagement, with an emphasis on a Kuyperian commitment to cultural renewal and how this may be interpreted from within the discipline of cultural anthropology. Throughout these foci I will draw attention to the priority of the complex, cultural other, and how a dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism can contribute to a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

5.2.1 The problem of defining “culture”

In Chapter One I described how “culture” has been defined in the Reformed tradition as either religious, or as a system of shared, learned, and reproduced values and beliefs.[664] Neo-Calvinists have, in the main, steered clear of placing an absolute definition on “culture” and instead have tended to view cultural engagement as an outworking of their public faith in all spheres in society.[665] However, in Chapter Four I highlighted the fact that in cultural anthropology the belief that “culture” is a system of shared, learned, and reproduced values and behaviours has been thoroughly contested.[666] What this means for a thesis concerned with theological cultural engagement is that a way forward is required in being able to speak about “culture” faithfully, that takes into consideration the multiple cultural realities experienced by human beings on a

[664] For example, Strange categorizes “culture” as “religion externalised.” Strange, *Plugged In*, 47. Turnau defines “culture” as “the human imaging of God’s community, communion, and creativity in engaging and responding to the meanings inherent in God’s creation (revelation) in order to create “worlds” of shared meanings that glorify God, demonstrate love to other humans, and demonstrate care for the rest of creation.” Turnau, *Popologetics*, 59

[665] I suggest in Chapter Two that it may be rightly said that for Kuyper “culture” was religious, but not in the way that Strange and Turnau view the word. For Kuyper, all cultural activity was under the lordship of Christ and related back to him through common grace. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 269.

[666] Aguilar writes, “The ordinary use of *culture* as a word that encompasses shared customs, practices and therefore meanings has been recently challenged.” Aguilar, “Changing models,” 308.

daily basis. This section of this chapter is concerned with how to speak culturally in a way that gives meaning to those multiple cultural realities as well as paying respect to the somewhat indefinable nature of a person's diverse cultural experiences.[667]

5.2.2 Beginning with a Kuyperian worldview

For Kuyper, the key to understanding the socio-historical and philosophical movements of his contemporary cultural context was the development of a Calvinist worldview.[668] This worldview depended heavily on using Scripture as a lens through which to view reality.[669] Theologians who are influenced by neo-Calvinism therefore speak about "culture" using ideas, concepts, insights, and implications which are based on this theological foundation.[670] It is from this foundation that Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty arises, in which society consists of many spheres; diverse, multiform, plural, individually sovereign in their own right, but organically related to and interdependent upon each other. This suggests that there are also many different cultural manifestations present in one society, an idea which is seen as positive in neo-Calvinism and essential for human cultural flourishing and human cultural development.[671] Sphere sovereignty is not easy to define exhaustively, and if sphere sovereignty is an integral idea in Kuyperian theological cultural engagement then this indefinability may legitimately extend to "culture."[672]

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[667] For example, Clifford writes, "Cultures are not scientific "objects" (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences). Culture, and our views of "it," are produced historically, and are actively contested. There is no whole picture that can be "filled in," since the perception and filling of a gap lead to the awareness of other gaps." Clifford, "Introduction," 18.

[668] Kuyper claimed and argued that Calvinism "meets every required condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 25.

[669] This is at the heart of Reformed theology and demonstrated well in Carson's treatment of the five themes or turning points of biblical theology which he terms "non-negotiables:" Creation, Fall, the giving of the Law, the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, and eschatological themes of heaven and hell. See e.g., Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 44-45. It is also the bedrock for Wolters "reformational worldview."

[670] For example, Keller draws on both the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of creation which have been framed by biblical theology in his critique of "every human culture" which "is an extremely complex mixture of brilliant truth, marred half-truths, and overt resistance to the truth." Our biblical worldview should lead us to understand the complexity of cultural groups. Keller, *Center Church*, 109.

[671] Chaplin emphasises this point in his argument for institutional pluralism: that every one of the diverse social groups in society makes "a unique, irreplaceable and complementary contribution to a flourishing human social existence." Chaplin, *Faith in the State*, 18.

[672] Harinck suggests this indefinability in his comments on Kuyper's use of sphere sovereignty during his lifetime. Kuyper did not develop the idea systematically, he used it as a mandate to exhort Reformed Christians to exercise their freedom as citizens to live their faith

Kuyperian sphere sovereignty depends on a Calvinist worldview; however, when it comes to cultural engagement that seeks to uphold the complexity of the "other", is it really possible to hold a singular worldview? Human beings are influenced by diverse cultural realities which makes it impossible to bind them to a particular "culture"; might the same be true for worldviews?[673] The fact that people inhabit multiple cultural worlds simultaneously at the very least suggests that worldviews are complex and that multiple perspectives are integral to those worldviews.[674] Kuyper's theology demonstrates Romantic influences alongside his Calvinist convictions which suggests that his worldview was complex. Holding a worldview is not a stumbling block to theological cultural engagement as long as the complexity of one's worldview is acknowledged and there is self-awareness on the part of the analyst.[675] In addition, as has been emphasised throughout this thesis, any discussion which involves Kuyperian sphere sovereignty and the worldview underpinning it must be tempered with a commitment to social equality, and the pursuit of a fair and just state. It is not enough to merely acknowledge Kuyper's shortcomings and the devastating effects of his theology; a change and a tempering must be sought.

5.2.3 Balancing theological views of "culture"

Related to the above is the fact that underpinning Kuyper's worldview of cultural engagement are theological claims which influence how "culture" is understood. Firstly, there is a belief in the goodness of creation and that "doing culture" is a God-given command sometimes known as the "cultural mandate."[676] Then there is the existence of sin, and that through God's common grace the effects of sin are restrained and all human beings are capable of doing good cultural

publicly, most obviously in the establishment of a Christian university. Sphere sovereignty after Kuyper has been dismissed and developed in various ways to become the "sociophilosophical" system it is today, but Harinck insists that it must still be understood within the setting of the Calvinist life-system, as Kuyper intended." See e.g., Harinck, "A Historian's Comment," 279-280.

[673] For example, does being British bind a person to a notion of a British "culture" and a British "worldview"? Aguilar's idea of the "death of culture" would seem to imply that worldviews as an extension of "culture" are also complex. See e.g., Aguilar, "Changing Models," 308.

[674] For example, Mouw demonstrates this through his suggestion that it is possible to hold diversity and commonness in tension. This requires at least two perspectives in one worldview. Mouw, *Adventures*, 136-139.

[675] Cultural movements are often ideologically driven. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 375.

[676] Schilder refers to this command as "the concrete cultural mandate to exploit the world's potentials." Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 22. Wolters renames it the "creational mandate." Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 42.

works.[677] Because of common grace there is a commonness across human cultural worlds which creates a basis for social, cultural, and political engagement.[678] Because of the existence of sin, all cultural worlds are in need of challenge, evangelism, renewal, and transformation through Christ.[679] Given that neo-Calvinism is a sphere in its own right, and that theological claims form an integral part of the sovereignty of that sphere, these theological views of cultural engagement are valid. However, we might want to hold these views against Clifford's claim that "Human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate, and subvert one another. Cultural analysis is always enmeshed in global movements of difference and power."[680] Again, what is called for in holding these theological views of cultural engagement is self-awareness.

5.2.4 Self-awareness in the Kuyperian worldview

Drawing on the priorities raised by cultural anthropologists in Chapter Four, it is clear that writing and talking about "culture" generally is a difficult task because the subject is not an easily identifiable object.[681] To which "culture" are theologians referring? Are theologians aware of their own "culture" before they begin writing and speaking about another? It may be argued that neo-Calvinism understands itself as being a product of its own various cultural settings: Kuyper developed Calvinism as a self-conscious endeavour to relate a specific theological framework to the changing social, political, and philosophical cultural changes of his time. For example, Kuyper's lectures in Calvinism are self-critiques. His defence and application of Calvinism as a life-system in all

[677] Schilder implies that because of sin culture cannot truly take the place in creation that God originally ordained for it; this will only happen through the restoration of human beings through Jesus Christ. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 19. With a slightly different emphasis, Wolters affirms the continuing goodness of creation while distinguishing between it and the effects of sin upon it in his description of structure and direction. For Wolters, *all* human cultural development which tends towards God's original purposes for creation, whether or not it comes at the hands of believers, will be gathered into God's kingdom. See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 60-61.

[678] Mouw relates this commonness to the image of God in all human beings. He refers to Herman Bavinck's assertion that "there is…a collective possession of the *imago*." Mouw, *Adventures*, 32.

[679] Renewal is at the heart of Wolters' Reformational worldview: this is the primary task for Christians in God's creation. See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 73. Keller's motivation for contextualization is cultural renewal through the gospel whereby the preaching of the gospel changes the hearts of individuals, and those changed individuals begin to change their cultural environments. See e.g., Keller, *Center Church*, 81-82.

[680] Clifford, "Introduction," 22.

[681] This is due to their fluctuating nature.

spheres of human life is a self-aware analysis and apologetic.[682] This suggests that Kuyper viewed Calvinism as a self-conscious movement from which a worldview could be developed; a worldview concerned with human cultural development. Kuyper takes the voice of Calvinism and changes its accent and inflection according to the various "worlds" with which it interacts.

5.2.5 Self-awareness and cultural complexity

In affirming liberty of conscience, Kuyper's Calvinism inadvertently promotes complex human cultural interactions. This is a self-conscious endeavour to embrace diversity in relating man to God, man to man, and man to the world, and to present in all spheres of human life both salvation and common grace.[683] To ensure that self-awareness is a priority in theological cultural engagement, theologians who write and speak about "culture" and those who engage with cultural contexts and cultural artefacts with the intention of cultural renewal, must take the time to become aware of their own complex cultural influences first. In addition, they should be prepared to adapt the application of their theological convictions, as Kuyper did, to the cultural changes which they encounter, being particularly mindful of the heterogeneous nature of their biblical theological convictions. It was in Calvinism that Kuyper found a worldview that emphasized the equality of all human beings because of its priority of living the whole of life before the face of God. Kuyper scholar Bartholomew writes: "Consequently, Calvinism condemns all open slavery and systems of caste, but also covert slavery of women and oppression of the poor."[684] Christian cultural engagement must make room for activities which promote this worldview, seeking the common good, and intentionally pursuing

[682] Kuyper is transparent in his conviction that Calvinism is the highest human life system; that as a movement it exists for the purpose of total cultural transformation. Kuyper describes Calvinism as "one of the principle phases in the general development of our human race ...whose high calling still is to influence the further course of human life." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 22.

[683] Calvinism therefore comes to the dialogue with cultural anthropology as a movement convinced that it "meets every required condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 25.

[684] Bartholomew, *Contours*, 111.

justice for those excluded in society on economic, social, racial, and gender grounds.

Self-awareness, and the acceptance that any attempt to define "culture" is futile, will go a long way to guard against paternalism and exclusion. For example, self-awareness and a working belief that a single, unified "culture" does not exist guards against the intentional engineering of a new cultural context whether that comes through contextualization of the gospel message or simply the theological imperative of cultural renewal.[685] If theological ideas can be applied rather than imposed upon diverse cultural contexts then it will be possible to adapt the "essence and particulars" of the Christian gospel from its heterogeneous cultural heritage to another cultural context without the accusation of colonialism.[686] This is vital for neo-Calvinism which is dominated in the main by white, wealthy, men. It must be able to reflect critically upon its historical, social, and political context, to be able to relate to other cultural contexts, and to understand how to embrace the reality that theological worlds undergo change through cultural influences bearing down upon them.[687] Crucially it must be able to own its heritage as privileged, white and European and take responsibility for promoting at times an *un*-Christian cultural engagement.

5.2.6 The sovereignty of "the other"

At the heart of sphere sovereignty is the preservation of distinctions whereby an individual sphere, or an individual human being is allowed to flourish in its own right.[688] As has already been explicated, this can give the value of "separateness" too much reign. However, liberty of conscience and equality are

[685] Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology*, 16.

[686] Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

[687] Neo-Calvinist scholar Gideon Strauss addresses this issue with regard to the relationship between neo-Calvinism and Africa, voicing the difficulties with identifying what it means to be African, given that this identification is often made against a colonial backdrop. Self-awareness in theological cultural engagement is therefore vital to the work, because the influences upon an individual's and a community's theological ideas are a complex tangle of historical and social prejudices. See e.g., Gideon Strauss, "Footprints in the Dust. Can neocalvinist theory be credible in post-colonial Africa?" *Acta Academia,* 28, no. 2, (1996): 3, https://www.academia.edu/1355047/Strauss_G._J._1996_._Footprints_in_the_dust_Can_neocalvinist_theory_be_credible_in_postcolonial_Africa_Acta_Academica_28_August_1996_1-35.

[688] In referring to the authority of the State in regulating sphere sovereignty Kuyper is explicit about how this also protects an individual from being "suppressed by the group in which one lives… Not to suppress life nor to shackle freedom but to make possible the free movement of life in and for every sphere." Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

also of paramount importance in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.[689] By extension, any cultural engagement in the neo-Calvinist movement must uphold this calling of the individual to be themselves, sovereign in their own right. In a similar way, the cultural anthropological priority of "the other" is viewed in their own right, without collapsing cultural distinctions between individuals, and without over-emphasising the differences.[690] On first reading this notion of freedom and sovereignty sounds idyllic; however, there are crucial questions to be asked: What are the implications of this for an individual or cultural group whose right to "sovereignty" may cause oppression to others? In the case of gender-based violence, does the sovereignty of a cultural group mean that all girls in that community must undergo female genital mutilation? Here, again, is where sphere sovereignty must be fully tempered with the prioritization of the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable, and where the pursuit of justice must bear upon the right of spheres to speak truth to power structures wherever they may be located. It is the exercise of keeping the antithesis in view. This is the Kuyperian worldview, the Calvinist worldview: it is complex, but it is its complexity that allows it to pursue cultural renewal while upholding cultural complexity.

5.2.7 Commonness, "the other", and cultural complexity

A way forward in referring to cultural renewal without dismissing the complex nature of cultural realities experienced by human beings, and without compromising liberty of conscience is to pursue commonness.[691] For example, a commitment to civility and a desire to learn from "the other" in dialogue demonstrate that commonness is in harmony with an individual's sovereignty. In addition, the fact that sphere sovereignty allows for both a commitment to "commonness" and to "the other" demonstrates the reality of cultural complexities at work in and across different spheres. In this respect, neo-Calvinism has a strong foundation of respecting cultural complexity, and self-awareness, and "the other" when it comes to theological cultural engagement.

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[689] Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 32.

[690] This is another reference to Louise Lawrence's description of "the other" and her call to find middle ground between two extreme approaches. Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[691] Commonness as a concept is built on Schilder's notion of *sinousia*. Mouw, *Adventures*, 96.

As Mouw implies, with regard to civility, commonness, and a desire to acknowledge cultural complexities, it may be prudent to withhold using the language of idolatry when attempting to define a cultural artefact, a cultural phenomenon, or a cultural world.[692] It will depend on who is doing the identifying of "idols" in a cultural group, how they have come to that conclusion, and what they intend to do with that conclusion.[693] The idea of idolatry may well be a valid biblical view in the Reformed tradition, but the importance of "bracketing" this particular view is found in the fact that those who are identifying "idolatry" must recognise that they cannot know exhaustively why that idolatry has come about and what purpose an idol may play in a cultural group. For example, Davies cites Lévi-Strauss' discussion of the use of totems amongst cultural groups which aid self-reflection, self-understanding, and self-knowledge.[694] From a subversive fulfilment perspective these totems would constitute idols which need exposing. However, there will be complex reasons for these totems and their use in a society that have evolved and changed and developed over time. Employing the language of idolatry in defining "culture" in the first instance transgresses freedom of conscience and the sovereignty of "the other". For example, the blatant dismissal of traditional African cultural practices and expressions by Dutch settlers may on the surface have appeared to be a biblical confrontation of idolatry, but the legacy of this theological colonialization decimated an African understanding of humanity which may not have been so incompatible with the Calvinist worldview.[695]

5.2.8 Language and "the other"

The above is a reminder to avoid language that binds "the other" to preconceived notions about them and their cultural worlds. There is a temptation to confuse theological and cultural language about others. For

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[692] This is similar to the idea of using "thick" and "thin" language in dialogue, whereby "thick" language relies heavily on exclusively Christian ideas, and "thin" language relies on ideas and concepts which are more inclusive and founded on commonness. See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 79-80.

[693] For example, Strange's "subversive fulfilment" is an attempt to define "culture" and contextualise the gospel in it by focusing on exposing particular idols in a particular context in order to subvert them with evangelism. *Plugged In*, 109-110.

[694] Davies, *Anthropology and Theology*, 4.

[695] This constitutes the equality of all human beings regardless of race. See e.g. Paris, "The African-American Understanding of Our Common Humanity," 276. This is compatible with the Calvinist worldview described by Bartholomew: the equality of all human beings. Bartholomew, *Contours*, 111.

example, anthropologist Courtney Handman recounts the visit of a Jewish Christian to the Papua New Guinean, Guhu-Samane Christians, who themselves identify as a lost Israelite tribe reconstituted through Jesus, the Messiah. While this visitor affirmed the use of traditional instruments and dancing in Christian worship, he discouraged the use of guitars because they belonged to "white peoples' traditions."[696] The effect of this comment on the community was twofold: some saw that they were able to be "modern" and Christian at the same time as hold on to their past musical traditions. Others saw that in fact taking on "white peoples' traditions" brought their worship closer to being acceptable to God.[697] This visit from a white Jewish Christian stepping into a culturally charged situation, viewing the aspirations of Pacific peoples through his own cultural-theological lenses, represents the kind of theological/cultural binding that needs to be taken into account in theological cultural engagement. The language of contextualisation needs de-colonising if it is to do justice to the complex cultural realities experienced by individual human beings. There also needs to be a recognition that because of cultural complexity re-contextualisation happens continually. As human beings are caught up in fluctuating cultural processes their worldviews and belief systems are being constantly challenged and influenced and re-contextualised.

5.2.9 The myth of "culture"

This section has focussed on the problem with defining "culture." This problem sits within the broader subject of the thesis which is whether it is possible to develop a meaningful theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition, one which takes seriously the complexities and indefinable nature of cultural realities and their impact on the cultural "other". I have asked whether a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology might provide a way forward in developing this kind of theological cultural engagement. The neo-Calvinist voices in this thesis, with their priorities of commonness, institutional pluralism, common grace, cultural renewal, social justice, and fair and just politics have demonstrated the movement's commitment to preserving diversity, complexity, and liberty of conscience while upholding a Reformed biblical

[696] Handman, ""The Future of Christian Critique," 119.
[697] Handman, "The Future of Christian Critique," 120.

worldview. Although coming from a different starting-point, the cultural anthropological voices in this thesis have emphasised the myth of "culture" and the impossibility of defining "culture" absolutely. A dialogue between the two enables an acknowledgement of the tensions between cultural processes and theological convictions without necessarily seeking to solve those tensions absolutely.

Neo-Calvinist theological priorities contain the potential for a greater awareness, understanding, and honouring of "the other" in theological cultural engagement. To do this requires two reflections. Firstly, theologians need to self-reflect on the complexities of their worldviews even as sphere sovereignty forms part of those worldviews. Sphere sovereignty will never be interpreted and applied in exactly the same way by two theologians, or even by the same theologian in a different moment.[698] Secondly and consequently, theologians need to critically examine their use of language. An avoidance of language that has overtones of normative discourses of development is vital, because "it ignores the specificity of the people who are supposed to benefit from it."[699] Mouw's reference to parenthetical "key evangelical concerns" in cultural engagement is a prime example of how to balance theological worldviews with upholding the complexity of "the other."[700]

This is a difficult suggestion for the Reformed tradition because it suggests a compromise on biblical theology. However, biblical theology is also culturally nuanced and full of diverse cultural interactions between individuals, people groups, historical situations, and God. The Reformed view that Scripture is infallible need not be in opposition to the obvious cultural tensions and complexities that exist within it. This is why theological self-awareness is critical to how we speak and write theologically about "culture." Theologians in the Reformed tradition may need to be prepared to allow cultural processes to run their course, all the while speaking out for justice and the common good, waiting patiently for the seeds of cultural renewal to do their work in and across various spheres, rather than trying to police an idea of "culture" that does not exist.

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[698] Being able to see ourselves rightly is closely associated with learning to view "the other" rightly. Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[699] Rollason is referring to indigenous peoples here but the same holds true for all kinds of cultural analysis. Rollason, "Introduction," 4.

[700] See e.g., Mouw, *Adventures*, 183.

5.3 A Multiperspectival Approach

If theological cultural engagement is to uphold cultural complexity and the unique calling of the cultural other, then it requires a multiperspectival approach. For this to happen, theology's voice needs to be infused with a presupposed inclination towards the organic nature of human cultural activity, alongside the preservation of distinctions between complex cultural interactions in the redemptive purposes of God for his creation. As has already been discussed, all kinds of cultural analysis must take the reality of cultural complexity into consideration. This is evidenced in Tyler's likening of ethnography to poetry (music or art could be other worthy analogies) in which "fragments of discourse" emerging from different authors co-operate to evoke a sense of a cultural world. These fragments provide the multiple and diverse perspectives required to engage more fully with a cultural context. In a similar way, when theologians write and speak about a cultural context theologically, and when Christians seek to engage with a cultural context for evangelism, or mission, or renewal, multiple perspectives will lead to a fuller picture of that with which they wish to engage.

5.3.1 "Endless multiformity", "difference", and "distinctions"

Without multiple perspectives, and without as broad an evocation of a cultural world as possible, any cultural theology or engagement will be hindered, and could prove to be futile and even damaging to that cultural world. Holding a multiperspectival view of a cultural context, and the processes which flow in and out of it will provide an authentic approach for Reformed theology to cultural complexity. Calvinism as a life-system which praises and upholds "endless multiformity," "difference," and "distinctions," provides such a voice.[701] Kuyper's sphere sovereignty provides a lens through which to view and engage with the entire scope of human cultural activity. A life-system in which every human being lives and operates sovereignly in various complex spheres gives validity to the multiform organism of human society.

Cultural heterogeneity under God's sovereignty is integral to Kuyper's Calvinism, and the maintenance of multiple perspectives is integral to the

[701] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16.

concept of sphere sovereignty, as outlined in Chapters One and Two. In theory, sphere sovereignty celebrates the diversity of God's creation, and the ensuing plural nature of societies, and cultural contexts by extension. In theory, sphere sovereignty keeps in tension the uniqueness of different social groups and their interrelatedness. Sphere sovereignty also keeps theological convictions in perspective: the guardianship of biblical theology is taken on by the institutional church (a sphere in its own right), and the outworking of biblical faith happens through the Christian members of many spheres. There is room in sphere sovereignty for renewal as Christians use their liberty of conscience and religious freedom (where it is given by the state) to speak out for justice and righteousness in society. There is a natural outworking of complexity as each sphere fulfils a different and unique function in creation.[702] Therefore, one sphere is "other" to a different sphere, providing muliformity in society. Cultural groups operate in similar ways, as do individuals. It is possible in this view to approach the cultural "other" in a manner that upholds complexity, commonness, and sovereignty, always tempering with the call to equality and justice.

5.3.2 Sphere sovereignty and cultural complexity

In the Kuyperian worldview sphere sovereignty is the way in which human beings fulfil the cultural mandate through cultural development. Mouw writes: "God created a macroordering of diverse spheres of cultural interaction, and he gave to each of the individual spheres its own unique internal orderedness."[703] A multiperspectival approach must be employed in theological cultural engagement to faithfully reflect the diversity of cultural interactions in creation. This approach upholds distinctions and diversity, difference and interrelatedness, and in so doing promotes the complex nature of cultural realities.[704] In this view, theological cultural engagement will inevitably involve some kind of co-operation between different viewpoints (as Tyler suggests),

[702] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 24.

[703] Richard J. Mouw, "Some Reflections on Sphere Sovereignty," in *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 95

[704] Mouw describes the sense of need in contemporary Kuyperianism to emphasis interconnectedness between spheres as a guard against interminable fragmentation. However, there is still a need to uphold the distinctiveness of spheres, primarily the separation between God the Creator and his creation. Mouw, "Some Reflections," 105.

therefore there is no reason why cultural complexity should be seen as a problem to be solved theologically.

If there is an assumption that cultural complexity must be solved by theology it is based on a misunderstanding of the cultural flux and complexity at work in all cultural movements.[705] Cultural change, cultural complexity, and cultural conflict all occur in theological circles, including within the Reformed tradition itself. All theological movements are cultural, and no cultural movement is untouched by cultural flux. Theological "cultures" are pluralist and they are in constant flux. Here is where the element of self-awareness is crucial. Theology comes to cultural engagement as a complex and plural mixture of historical, social, and cultural influences which all bear down upon biblical interpretation and gospel ministry. This view is crucial in understanding the scope and limitations of sphere sovereignty in providing a basis for multiple perspectives.

5.3.3 Limitations of sphere sovereignty

As has been discussed at length in previous chapters, sphere sovereignty has its limitations. Sphere sovereignty appears to demonstrate the possibility of faithfulness to the Reformed theological tradition and a commitment to cultural complexity without the need to simplify cultural processes at work in the different spheres. However, as well as the continued question over whether sphere sovereignty should even be on the table in discussing theological cultural engagement, a further question arises concerning the validity of sphere sovereignty in indigenous cultural groups where ways of operating as a society are not clearly defined in terms of "state", "church", "family" and other distinct spheres.[706] In other words, does sphere sovereignty only work in a society where there has already been some separation between spheres? For example, is it still possible to apply sphere sovereignty to a society that does not resemble either the Netherlands in the late 19th century, or the USA in the 21st? Is sphere sovereignty in itself a itself a cultural and colonial blindspot that

[705] All cultural movements, including theological ones, emerge out of a synthesis of existing cultural movements. Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 107.

[706] This may be due to the difference between societies which are governed by economic growth – individualistic societies - and clan-based societies which are known as "gift economies." The difference between these lies in the relationship between the consumer and the commodity, and between the people who exchange commodities. For example, see C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015), lviii-lix, lxii.

imposes a worldview upon other kinds of societies rather than upholding the complexity and sovereignty of the cultural other? As Storkey suggests, the insights offered by Abraham Kuyper more than one hundred years ago continue to provide a foundation for cultural engagement *but* with the caveat that those insights may require unpicking from some of his historical contexts, and updating in a climate of post-colonialism.[707]

As Richard Mouw states, sphere sovereignty and the affirmation of cultural diversity must be nuanced if it is to avoid prejudice and discrimination.[708] Sphere sovereignty as a worldview should be held together with the other Kuyperian worldviews which uphold it: common grace, the antithesis, and special grace, along with his commitment to social justice. An acknowledgement that all of life is upheld by God's providential love and care for his creation will level the playing field for cultural groups; God has no favourite spheres. An acknowledgment that sin has affected the totality of creation and the antithesis runs through every social institution, every cultural group, and every individual whether Christian or not will bring humility to all attempts of contextualization and cultural renewal. An acknowledgment of God's decisive answer to the antithesis in salvation through Jesus Christ by grace, and not by any other work of humanity, will shape the way Christians operate within and across many spheres, and inspire compassion and commonness across diverse cultural groups. By acknowledging these aspects of Kuyperianism alongside sphere sovereignty it is possible to build on the idea of spheres and an organic, plural society for multiperspectivalism in theological cultural engagement.

5.3.4 Christological multiple perspectives

A further aspect of Kuyperianism that lends itself to the upholding of multiple perspectives is the effect of special grace on society.[709] Special grace flows out into human society via the organic church and raises a prophetic voice for justice and righteousness within cultural contexts via the sphere of the

[707] Storkey, "Sphere Sovereignty and the Anglo-American Tradition," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Luis E. Lugo (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 189.

[708] Mouw, *Adventures in Evangelical Civility*, 138-140.

[709] This is the foundation for Kuyper's fourth terrain in which the effects of special grace have influenced society through confessional organisations within the spheres to such a degree that society is being transformed. Kuyper, "Common Grace," 200.

institutional church. Special grace speaks hope into cultural confusion and complexity but not with a view to conformity and simplicity. Special grace points to the Christ who holds all things together, who rules over every square inch of creation, and who came not to *simplify* "culture" but to redeem all cultural groups, cultural expressions, and cultural movements from their brokenness. This belief is upheld in Kuyper's Christology - his understanding of grace and nature held together in Christ - and Bavinck's description of grace restoring nature in Christ.[710] Neo-Calvinism does not view cultural complexity as a problem to be solved, but as a glorious reality to be reoriented in Christ who gives the fullest meaning to creational diversity.[711] In neo-Calvinism, it is possible to hold multiple perspectives and uphold cultural complexity, but this is a Christological concern.

Cultural analysis requires the holding of multiple perspectives in order to provide accounts of people's cultural lives as they are actually experienced, rather than imposing the analyst's version on those accounts.[712] Theology also requires multiple perspectives and must employ many "fragments of discourse" in order to apply biblical theology to groups and individuals.[713] Here is where theology is able to engage in "otherness" in its cultural engagement: by allowing those individual and groups to flourish according to their individual callings. If a nuanced, tempered, updated neo-Calvinist concept of sphere sovereignty is a true depiction of how different cultural groups behave in society then it is entirely possible for individuals and groups to remain faithful to their theological tradition as they interact with and move between different spheres.[714] In this

[710] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 70.

[711] Mouw emphasises Kuyper's commitment to this idea that the spheres are only connected in one way and that is through being held together in God the Creator. This upholds their individual sovereignty and their createdness, as well as the hope for restoration through Christ. Mouw, "Some Reflections," 105.

[712] For example, in Crapanzo's critique of Geertz's "Deep Play" he argues that Geertz's accounts of the Balinese demonstrate a confusion between their accounts of themselves and his own perceptions. Crapanzo writes: "Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutical pretensions, there is in fact in "Deep Play" no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view." Crapanzo, "Hermes' Dilemma," 72, 74.

[713] This is in reference to Stephen Tyler's suggestion that in order to evoke a sense of a cultural experience "fragments of discourse" are required to make "a co-operatively evolved text." Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125.

[714] This, in fact, was at the heart of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty: that faith should be lived publicly in all spheres of life, and properly defended in all spheres of life, and that Christians should work for the continual reformation of the institutional church. Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 33.

view, a renewed sphere sovereignty should also allow for the freedom of individuals to imagine their own futures without reference to God, without coercion or manipulation from any imposed theological worldview. Not only this, but those who uphold this kind of sphere sovereignty also have a duty to uphold that freedom.[715]

5.3.5 Multiple spheres provide diverse cultural texts

The idea that a cultural context or a cultural group can be evoked through "fragments of discourse," rather than known and understood through universal paradigms partners well with Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. This is because as individuals interact with and pass through various spheres, such as the family, education, workplace, government institutions, music, theatre, and so on, they collect fragments of those spheres in the form of influences. These fragments are then assimilated and processed through the worldviews of individuals, worldviews which themselves are constructed from a complex variety of cultural influences, and also therefore subject to change. Individuals adapt and modify these fragments and pass them on to others in different spheres. These fragments create a sense of a cultural group or sphere, but they do not represent everything that may said about that sphere. This also works on a collective as well as an individual level: spheres themselves may act according to their pre-ordained norms, as described by Wolters and Chaplin, but the behaviour of the groups which make up those spheres will be fragmented and complex because no one human being is a member of only one isolated sphere. Cultural groups represent the different texts of multiple spheres, and each member of a cultural group represents further texts of multiple spheres adding layer upon layer to the cultural complexity that exists in sphere sovereignty.

What does this mean for cultural engagement? Firstly, theologians should not fear this complexity but celebrate diversity in human cultural activity. Richard Mouw writes: "Approaching the "givens" of our experience, including the ways in which we understand God and God's relationship to humankind, in a manner that features defamiliarization and fragmentation – this can be a healthy

[715] This is the kind of sovereignty Kuyper argues for and defends in *Our Program* because it upholds freedom of conscience for all. For example, see Kuyper, *Our Program*, 69.

thing."[716] This gives some affirmation to the idea that we construct our thinking about a "culture" through the gathering of "fragments of discourse" from different sources. However, Mouw attaches a caveat to fragmentation which warns against it being an end in itself and a "permanent mode of being in the world."[717] He explains further that the problem lies in the fact that diversity can become a bottomless pit, and an endless train of multiple fragments which makes it impossible to speak sensibly and definitively about anything. Although this is from a different context, there are echoes here of Rollason's criticism of cultural relativism: an extreme view of diversity can lead to a binding of individuals to simply be reproducers of their cultural traditions.[718]

Mouw draws parallels between what he calls "irreducible diversity" and the biblical story of Babel and argues that the solution to this is found in pursuing the diversity found instead at Pentecost, which is given by the Spirit.[719] Through the Spirit the gospel reaches "a rich variety of human cultural contexts" while at the same time giving them commonality and unity. Mouw's argument encapsulates the neo-Calvinist approach to cultural complexity and also to cultural renewal. Remaining faithful to the Reformed tradition does not entail simplifying cultural complexity but renewing it in the light of the gospel. This leads into a second implication for cultural engagement: the pursuit of cultural renewal through social and political engagement, through evangelism, through Christian involvement in the arts, for example, must be done with care and sensitivity to cultural complexity. This requires theologians to work hard at contextualization and view it operating on many different levels at the same time. There may be one gospel, but it must be applied in such a way that promotes complexity rather than seeking to conform or bind cultural groups to alien cultural processes and patterns. This is "otherness" in action.

5.3.6 A post-cultural gospel?

Tim Keller provides an excellent example of how a complexity-centred gospel might be understood. In his book, *The Prodigal God*, in which Keller retells the

[716] Mouw, *Evangelical Civility*, 133.
[717] Mouw, *Evangelical Civility*, 133.
[718] Rollason, "Introduction," 8-9. Relativism can be as destructive as notions of what constitutes an economically stable future. Both discourses bind cultural groups to other people's narratives of their futures.
[719] Mouw, *Evangelical Civility*, 136-138.

Biblical parable of the reckless younger son who returns to his father as a "prodigal," and the upright older son who displays anger at his father's forgiveness, Keller offers some insight into how this estrangement between the two brothers is demonstrated in "culture wars."[720] There is a perpetual disjunction between those who reject moral absolutes and those who worship them, and both positions play out in cultural expressions. However, in a surprising twist, Keller develops his theme through explaining the origins of Christianity as an atheist concept.[721] Without a temple, priests, or sacrifices, Christianity was an enigma.[722] Here, Keller has stripped the Christian faith of its institutional and cultural trappings and relocated the Christian gospel - spiritual reality according to Christ - at its heart. This commitment to holding the gospel, rather than religious legalism, as the standard for theological cultural engagement is the foundation for Keller's writing in *Center Church* and his work at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. His approach is neither relativistic nor legalistic; it is the painstaking pursuit of a complex, multifaceted, goal-orientated, and highly courteous relationship between the Christian gospel and cultural contexts. It may even be thought of as post-cultural in an anthropological sense: avoiding the pitfall of predicting what the outworking of the gospel will like in the future based upon what it has looked like in the past.

This example from Keller suggests that contextualisation is a theological outworking of cultural pluralism in which the three distinctions of the antithesis, common grace, and special grace are continually present. The effects of sin on creation and humanity are total and therefore the antithesis affects every individual and every cultural group, but it does so in multiple ways. It automatically encompasses complexity and of itself contributes to that complexity. God's providential sustenance and provision for his creation and for humanity affects every individual and every cultural group, but it does so in multiple ways. Common grace is the basis for the flourishing of complexity in the face of the antithesis. God's remedy for the effects of sin through the

[720] Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (Dutton: New York, 2008), 12.

[721] Keller writes, "It is hard for us today, but when Christianity first arose in the world it was not called a religion. It was the non-religion." Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 13.

[722] "So the Romans called them "atheists," because what the Christians were saying about spiritual reality was unique and could not be classified with the other religions of the world." Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 14.

redemptive work of Christ is available to every individual and every cultural group, but it comes to individuals and cultural groups through the way they perceive it according to their backgrounds and experiences. In that sense individuals and groups receive the Christian gospel as fragments of another discourse which evokes the remedy which God has provided for sin through Christ. Common grace provides the context for individuals and cultural groups to experience special grace, but as Chaplin comments, common grace is a manifestation of the antithesis.[723] This relationship between the antithesis, common grace, and special grace causes cultural complexity and invokes the necessity of holding multiple perspectives simultaneously. That is why imposing a simplistic narrative of idolatry onto Christian cultural engagement cannot be the only approach to the complex, cultural "other".

5.3.7 Cultural complexity leads to human flourishing

These Kuyperian distinctions between common and special grace, and the antithesis exist simultaneously, affecting individuals and groups in multiple ways, and adding layer upon layer of complexity to cultural processes. Yet they all emanate from one unifying gospel given by one unifying Spirit. Cultural complexity and theological orthodoxy are not in opposition because cultural complexity itself reflects the Triune nature of God.[724] Those who are driven to impose a strict uniform theological order on the seeming chaos of cultural pluralism do so because they been seduced by their own cultural blindspots. Kuyper's idea of the operation of multiple spheres, rather than creating a strict hierarchical order, promotes individual and civil liberty by protecting all spheres against domination by either state or church, thereby allowing cultural complexity to cause human cultural flourishing. This is why the concept of institutional pluralism (akin to sphere sovereignty) is so important: for human flourishing, the state must identify "specific *institutional* rights like those of

[723] Referencing Kuyper, Chaplin explains that common grace allows God to uphold the norms of his creation in the face of sin. Common grace will remain only until the eschaton when all is redeemed finally in Christ. Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 50.

[724] Bavinck writes: "The foundation of both diversity and unity is in God...Here is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol*. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 436. As a result of this diversity and unity Bavinck describes the world as an organism that is made up of many different parts yet held together by an "ethical bond." God, as Creator, holds together cultural complexity within the unity of creation.

families, schools, trades unions, churches, charitable associations, and so on. The idea of public justice rests on a strong assertion of such rights, and an insistence that a state which ignores or casually overrides them will not only exceed its authority but also make bad public policy."[725] Pluralism is necessary to guard against the domination of the state, or any other singular institution. Pluralism depends upon the holding of multiple perspectives. Pluralism is necessary to human flourishing.

5.3.8 Post-colonial multiple perspectives

Multiple perspectives can also aid in the nuancing of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty for a post-colonial and post-apartheid context. Referencing the African philosopher Valentin Mudimbe, neo-Calvinist scholar Gideon Strauss writes: "The postcolonial scholar has no other option but to critically appropriate some intellectual tradition ultimately derived from an imperial metropolitan source — and such an appropriation cannot but be affected by the memories of slavery, colonisation, and racism."[726] This is particularly true of neo-Calvinism because of its link to apartheid in the South African mindset. Strauss explains that sphere sovereignty was used as justification for apartheid because of the separation between social institutions that the principle advocates, silencing all pleas for racial equality, and interrelatedness on the basis of Christian doctrine.[727] Like Botman, Strauss suggests that there were more influences at work in apartheid than this early neo-Calvinism, that sphere sovereignty was misapplied, and that neo-Calvinists have, in fact, developed a critique of apartheid.[728] As already been established, neo-Calvinism in the African context, then, demands hard work not just of contextualization but of repentance, humility, self-awareness, and renewal. The Africanization of Reformed theology

[725] Chaplin, "Faith in the State," 20.

[726] Strauss, "Footprints," 6-7.

[727] See e.g., Strauss, "Footprints," 19-20. It can be argued that Kuyper himself was complicit in some attitudes of racism and in apartheid. Referencing Dooyeweerd, Strauss comments that German Romanticism and not neo-Calvinism may have contributed to these ideas. Strauss, "Footprints," 20 (footnote).

[728] This leads him into suggesting that renewal must be at the heart of South African neo-Calvinism. See e.g., Strauss, "Footprints," 26-27.

should be a priority for neo-Calvinism, because a post-colonial African and Reformed view of humanity will enrich the Christian world.[729]

5.3.9 Post-colonial Kuyperianism and "otherness"

Employing multiple perspectives in analysis is vital for post-colonial theological cultural engagement. Another voice emerging from the African scene is neo-Calvinist theologian Robert D. Falconer. He suggests an African contextualized theology of the atonement which depends upon the reality of witchcraft in communities to make sense of Christ's atoning work as victory over evil.[730] Falconer does not explicitly use Kuyperian terms but his adaption of Vanhoozer's dramaturgy, and his emphasis upon "God's cosmic drama and the socio-renewal of Africa" which is brought about through the church's teaching of the atonement and its application to daily life, points to Falconer's neo-Calvinist influences.[731] In contrast to the imposition and misapplication of some neo-Calvinist ideas in the past, Falconer is concerned with letting the African context quite literally set the scene for the application of the Christian gospel. Anthropologically, this could be called "otherness" in the sense that new and different future contextualizations of the Christian faith are possible. However, as already demonstrated in the South African situation, a recontextualization of Reformed theology, Kuyperian or otherwise, is a necessary part of the post-

[729] Tshaka comments that although "Reformed theology had imposed its methodologies indiscriminately, without seeking ways of learning from the African situation" the fact that the centre of Christianity is now located in the global south has led some to realise "that perhaps there is much that can be learned from the African and his or her situation." Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed."

[730] Falconer refers to the apostle Paul's atonement theology in Ephesians and Colossians, describing the totality of Christ's atoning work in terms of penal substitution and victory of the powers of evil. Robert D. Falconer, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Cosmic Drama: An African Socio-Hermeneutic," *Conspectus* 22, (2016): 133-135, https://www.academia.edu/29322252/The_Lion_the_Witch_and_the_Cosmic_Drama_An_African_Socio-Hermeneutic. Witchcraft operates at every level of society, according to Falconer, and is viewed as the great enemy of society because of its destructive properties. This contextualization of the antithesis (using neo-Calvinist language) in an African setting is vital in understanding how a neo-Calvinist theological cultural engagement may extend beyond its white, western borders.

[731] Vanhoozer's dramaturgy is founded upon Calvin's understanding of creation as God's theatre in which the story of salvation, written by God the Father, put into action by God the Son, and dressed by God the Spirit, is acted out upon the cosmic stage. For Falconer, on Africa's stage witchcraft and the "Royal Lion" (a deliberate reference to C.S. Lewis's Aslan) are the main actors, with pastors, missionaries, and believers also on stage. The link to what Kuyperians may term cultural renewal can be seen in this statement: "Dramaturgy in the African cosmic drama then, considers the dramatic composition on Africa's 'social stage', articulating the large themes and finer details, providing the whole narrative with structure, plot, and climax." Falconer, "The Lion," 132.

colonial African Christian consciousness.[732] Although anthropology and theology have different starting points, a dialogue between the two is facilitating a wider application of multiple perspectives in a variety of contexts, which is a significant aspect of renewing Christian cultural engagement in its approach to the complex, cultural "other".

5.4 A Positive View of Human Cultural Activity

From a neo-Calvinist perspective, a positive view of human cultural activity begins with creation theology. However, this presupposes the existence of God. Is it possible for there to be a meaningful dialogue on this issue between neo-Calvinist voices and cultural anthropologists when there is such a discrepancy in the starting points of both disciplines? Joel Robbins suggests that while the relationship between theology and anthropology is "awkward" the dialogue and collaboration between the two disciplines in their broad terms is gaining traction.[733] Robbins attributes this in part to the expansion of the notion of theology to include the intellectual nature of religious practice wherever it is found, but in addition the concept of "otherness" plays a crucial role.[734] However, Robbins' concluding point is that anthropology and theology will continue to be different to each other but that this is not necessarily a barrier to dialogue. In line with the descriptions of divergence and difference at the start of this chapter, and in resonance with the distinctions made possible through Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, Robbins suggests "that the dialogue between anthropology and theology likely works best when it is preoccupied not with seeking agreement, but with registering what the differences between the two fields have to teach both sides."[735] This chapter then proceeds with the continued acknowledgment of difference between cultural anthropology and

[732] Tshaka explains that the power of Reformed theology lies in its emphasis on embodying its confessions: therefore, by implication, to embody Reformed theology in its African context requires a serious reflection on the complex nature of what it means to be African. Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed."

[733] This conclusion followed a series of articles in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* which focused on the potential within future engagements between theology and anthropology with the specific aim of "re-modelling the practice of anthropology." Philip Fountain and Sin Wen Lau, "Anthropological Theologies: Engagements and Encounters," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2013): https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/taja.12048.

[734] For Robbins, a clear example for anthropology of the employment of otherness in Christian theology is in ecumenism. Robbins, "Afterword," 334.

[735] Robbins, "Afterword," 336.

neo-Calvinism and an acceptance that this difference is integral to the dialogue and to the thesis as a whole.

5.4.1 Theology: common grace and creation

There are two theological areas in which a positive view of human cultural activity is embraced in Neo-Calvinism: creation theology, and the idea of common grace. Beginning with Bavinck, a positive view of creation is the starting point for viewing human cultural activity.[736] Although the revelation of God via creation is insufficient for salvation it is this that gives a commonness to all humanity, Christians and non-Christians alike. An extension of this commonness is surely collaboration between Christians and non-Christians in human cultural activity within and across different cultural spheres. This extension is possible because of the implication that God reveals himself through creation to all human beings in order for creation to flourish, for human beings to delight in creation, and for all of human cultural activity to bring God glory.[737] Creation theology in the neo-Calvinist tradition not only provides the context for a positive view of human cultural activity throughout history, it also provides the hope for a more glorious fulfilment in the age to come.

5.4.2 Ideology and cultural renewal

Jack Eller describes cultural changes which are driven by specific movements as being ideological in nature. From this perspective, Neo-Calvinism's commitment to a specific theology of creation and the future of cultural renewal is an example of such ideology. In particular, "revitalization movements" can be drivers of cultural change: Eller describes these movements as "a special type of self-directed change."[738] Cultural change as a result of cultural renewal is a self-conscious, intentional aim of neo-Calvinism therefore calling this branch of

[736] Bavinck writes: "To the devout everything in nature speaks of God." There is no separation between the revelation of God in creation and the revelation of God in Scripture; they are different modes of revelation but not separate revelations. Therefore everything that has been made, including the materials with which human beings shape their civilisations and cultural groups, speaks of God. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 2*, 308.

[737] Using Calvin's idea that creation is "the theatre of God's glory" Bavinck describes the purpose and goal for creation, which is God's glory. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 2*, 406. As described in chapter two, Wolters expands Bavinck's creation theology with his dual concepts of structure and direction: structure equates to the God's purpose and goal of creation which God has revealed through law, and human beings either direct creation towards that purpose and goal or away from it.

[738] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 432.

Reformed theology an ideological revitalisation movement is not inappropriate. A neo-Calvinist positive view of creation, with its hope of renewal and redemption, and the subsequent positive view of human cultural activity does not undermine the effects of sin, nor does it undermine the antithesis: as described in the previous section, the antithesis is held in relationship with common and special grace at all times. In contrast, neo-Calvinist creation theology provides an imperative for Christians to engage vigorously and with delight in cultural pursuits and endeavours in all spheres for the glory of God.

A Kuyperian commitment to common grace underpins the trajectory of cultural development in neo-Calvinism.[739] God still considers his creation to be good and shows a type of grace towards it in sustaining, providing for, and blessing it in many and multiple ways.[740] This conviction of an attitude of grace towards creation in partnership with a commitment to the purpose and goal of creation can lead to a positive view of human cultural activity not just by theologians, but by all Christians. The outcomes of this dual commitment may include a seeking after public justice, campaigning and researching for an end to gender-based violence, taking concerned action about climate change and world poverty, and speaking truth to powerful institutions where racism is still structurally endemic. In short, a positive view of human cultural activity based on a positive view of creation may result in a genuine commitment to cultural renewal for the good of humanity and the glory of God. All forms of theological cultural engagement, including evangelism, will take place not with the aim of subverting a cultural world to impose upon it a phantom "Christian culture" but with the aim of renewing what already exists in the light of the all-sufficiency of Christ.[741] The commonness that results from God's revelation of himself through creation will lead Christians to actively participate in cultural activity such as music and the arts, in science, in education and in government and so on, so that these

[739] Kuyper remarks that common grace equips the human race for a "rich and mulitform development." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 543.

[740] Douma summarizes Calvin's general use of the word "grace" which includes creational gifts and restraint of sin. The latter is particularly significant for society. Douma, *Common Grace*, 243-244, 263-264.

[741] Keller writes, "Our premises must be drawn wholly from the Bible, yet we will always find some things in a culture's beliefs that are roughly true, things on which we can build our critique." Keller, *Center Church*, 125.

cultural spheres may prosper and progress towards God's original purpose and goal for creation.

5.4.3 Anthropology: cultural renewal and millenarianism

With cultural renewal at the heart of the Kuyperian movement, it may be compared to a particular type of revitalisation movement: millenarianism. Eller describes millenarianism as stemming from a dissatisfaction with the current status quo and a subsequent desire to usher in a new era.[742] This cultural change usually begins as a movement sometimes with a charismatic leader who announces the nearness of the new age, and its end game is revolution. It is easy to see why Karen Wenell puts Jesus Christ and his message alongside Te Ua as a millennial leader announcing the nearness of the kingdom of God to an enslaved and bounded cultural group.[743] Does a theologically positive view of human cultural activity for the sake of cultural renewal inevitably make neo-Calvinism a millenarian movement? The answer to this question is both yes and no. It is partly a millenarian movement because it speaks about and intentionally pursues transformation. This transformation is carried explicitly and implicitly in the worldview of the Christian and is always present in motivation and action; a worldview that is founded upon a revelation – Scripture – and, to some extent, an influential leader – Abraham Kuyper.

If the description stopped here neo-Calvinism could possibly be described as millennial. However, the ideal of cultural transformation is nuanced by the commitment to cultural renewal for the genuine good of society as a whole, regardless of the beliefs of individual members of society. A Kuyperian worldview of cultural renewal allows for the reality of the antithesis at work in creation, which means that not all members of a society will want to identify with the Christian faith and they have the liberty to do so.[744] Nevertheless, God's special grace is still available to all humanity, not by coercion or manipulation,

[742] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 372.

[743] Relating millenarian movements to sacred land, Wenell compares the Jesus movement and the Maori *Hauhau* movement. Karen Wenell, "Land as Sacred," 211.

[744] Kuyper draws attention to the reality of sin in civil life in his statement that even though Scripture has much to say about justice, because it is interpreted by sinners there can never be a once-for-all set of laws and ordinances for all times and all peoples. Kuyper, *Our Program*, 37.

but by invitation.[745] Therefore, while neo-Calvinism shares some similarities with millenarian movements, its agenda is not to replace society but to renew it for the good of all and the glory of God.

5.4.4 Cultural renewal, "otherness", and imagining futures

A neo-Calvinist worldview gives Christians a positive incentive to invite non-believers to encounter Jesus Christ by way of engaging naturally in cultural activity and by way of influencing society to direct cultural development towards God's original intention for creation. A positive view of human cultural activity leads away from an over-concentration on the antithesis in the relationship between Christians and "the world," and towards the broadest possible implementation of cultural renewal for the good of humanity and the glory of God.[746] This is "otherness" that Robbins suggests is lacking in cultural anthropology.[747] This "otherness" gives rise to the outworking of sphere sovereignty and the idea of the organic church and prevents neo-Calvinism as a movement from rising up to aggressively overthrow the current age. Because of the "otherness" that exists in neo-Calvinist theology through liberty of conscience and personal sovereignty, the emphasis is upon renewal rather than subversion.

Exactly what kind of cultural renewal exists in the Kuyperian imagination? Neo-Calvinist theology imagines a future for creation which brings to fulfilment human cultural development throughout history. It allows for all individuals to share in that fulfilment by flourishing culturally in their own right through "the free movement of life in and for every sphere."[748] Kuyper's sphere sovereignty follows through the life of creation and human cultural development to its end goal where it achieves its greatest potential. A positive view of human cultural activity that is genuinely committed to renewal in all areas of society will not only

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[745] This is evidenced by Kuyper's explanation of why the state should never "meddle" with the business of salvation because it "always degrades the honor of God instead of exalting it and chokes the life of piety instead of causing it to flourish." Kuyper, *Our Program*, 63.

[746] This overemphasis may include a focus on idolatry as the main approach to theological cultural engagement based on the presupposition that "culture is how we worship." Strange, *Plugged In*, 47.

[747] This is in reference to Robbins' suggestion that theology engages with "otherness" in ways which highlight shortcomings in anthropology. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 287.

[748] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

uphold cultural diversity and complexity but will also address the needs of cultural groups as far-reaching as their environment and habitats.[749] Liberty of conscience and individual human flourishing is swept up in this journey, opening up the possibility of new, imagined futures for cultural projects. Because of this individual sovereignty, neo-Calvinism provides the context for individuals experiencing complex cultural realities to pursue futures that may not be interpreted by their past. However, a careful interpretation of sphere sovereignty is needed here, and requires two further aspects to balance any emphasis on individual sovereignty. First, spheres must work together interdependently and interrelated in order for society to flourish. Spheres need each other; the same is true on an individual level. In a community or cultural group individuals must work together interdependently and as interrelated beings: this is especially vital in the pursuit of racial and economic justice.[750] This aspect is also vital for reflecting on whether sphere sovereignty and Reformed theology in general really works outside of a Western, capitalist context: the complexities of non-Western identities caused by colonialism and continued economic exclusion require a difficult, complex, and painstaking approach to cultural engagement if cultural renewal is to have any meaning in such diverse contexts.[751]

5.4.5 Future possibilities and the cultural "other"

If a positive, if complex, view of cultural activity was implemented in theological cultural engagement the impact would be for the good of all creation. This is particularly pertinent for the claim above that neo-Calvinism's view of the future of cultural development allows individuals to flourish in their own right. As has become clear in this thesis, the fact that neo-Calvinist theology is still largely located in the global North is a problem because any notion of the future "good

[749] Notwithstanding the historical context of Kuyper's views on colonization, he was first and foremost committed to colonial policies which were intended for the good of the colonies, rather than for the good of the colonising nation. He was against the Dutch liberal "cultivation system" which violently thrusted "Western concepts on an Eastern people." Kuyper, *Our Program*, 304.

[750] The emphasis on unity in the Belhar Confession is a good example of this: it assumes a collective consciousness, not in order to dominate and control individuals, but to pursue a biblical theology of justice and unity that is a rejection of separateness and division.

[751] In colonialism, Reformation values such as the sovereignty of God. the lordship of Christ, and the infallibility of Scripture, were confused with capitalist ideas. Tshaka writes: "The notion Reformed is therefore tainted by its inherent capitalism, which became imperialism when it was applied to Africa." Moreover, it was characterized by its justification of "the exploitation of difference." Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed," footnote 5.

life" that bears the label of theology will be influenced by modern ideas of development and economics. A de-colonisation of creation theology, and a willingness to understand Reformed theology beyond the limits of capitalism is imperative. This will increase the potential impact of "otherness" that such a vision of the cultural future can bring to cultural engagement. Part of this de-colonising lies in being aware that a commitment to civility and commonness, and cultural participation and renewal may reinforce normative discourses that place "the other" on an unequal footing.[752] Instead, a greater awareness of the complexity and sovereignty of the cultural other is needed. Mouw is closest to this in his neo-Calvinist approach to "the other" particularly in his suggestion of "de-familiarization" in terms of theology.[753] Not only would this approach allow a theologian to reassess their own cultural lenses, but it would enable them to view "the other" differently. This would increase the vitality of campaigns for equality and justice and increase the likelihood of civil relations and working for the common good.

Eller suggests that cultural anthropology does not have an end in view for human cultural activity; instead, it recognises that human beings re-invent their cultural contexts over and over again and uses ethnography to suggest insights for the future of "culture."[754] These insights can assist theological cultural engagement as it seeks to maintain a positive view of human cultural activity that incorporates a glorious cultural fulfilment. Understanding the major cultural changes currently at work in all parts of the world can better inform Christians in their commitment to cultural renewal. Understanding that we are all influenced by and agents of cultural change can also enable Christians to actively participate in cultural renewal. A positive view of human cultural activity will be enriched by collaboration with cultural anthropology and lead to a greater impact upon various cultural contexts.

[752] In over-emphasising commonness, for example, there is a danger of trying to make others cultural copies of ourselves instead of allowing them to be specifically themselves. Lawrence, "Introduction," 22.

[753] Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful*, 56.

[754] Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 383.

5.4.6 Open futures and the sovereign rule of God

The cultural complexities within cultural changes that are described above inevitably impact and influence cultural renewal and must be taken into consideration in theological cultural engagement. What do these complexities means, for example, when thinking about the kingdom of God? Dutch scholars Cornelis van der Kooi and Gisjbert van den Brink in their *Christian Dogmatics* write: "In the New Testament the kingdom of God is not a territorial but a spiritual category that refers to God's rule over all aspects of life."[755] As was apparent in the previous chapter, this rule is exercised through the realm of common grace and van der Kooi and van den Brink explain that in Kuyper's view, common grace offers a "positive evaluation of human cultural development."[756] It would seem that it is through common grace that Christians are able to participate in human cultural development with the worldview that because Christ rules over all creation then cultural transformation is both good for human development and glorifying to God. The fact that it is a "spiritual category" demonstrates the ideological nature of neo-Calvinist theology but also the very real possibility of open and unpredicted futures for those who subscribe to this view. Open futures exist precisely because of the sovereign rule of God over all aspects of life: God's diverse sovereign callings and the futures that will unfold from them are given not just to societal spheres but to individuals. Because of God's delegated sovereignty to spheres and individuals, no person, group, or sphere may encroach upon those callings and their futures by binding them to the past, or to cultural traditions.[757]

5.4.7 The significance of complexity in cultural renewal

Kuyper's Calvinism was broad in its ambition of renewal in every corner of society, but it was confined to the cultural context of his age. In order for the neo-Calvinist ambition of cultural renewal to reach every part of creation it must be able to perceive the multiple layers of cultural complexity in the current age.

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[755] Cornelis van der Kooi and Gisjbert van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 588

[756] Van der Kooi and van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, 520.

[757] Although Rollason does not refer to "sovereignty" in his treatment of ethnography amongst Pacific peoples, his emphasis on avoiding imposing an assumed future on individuals and groups is highly resonant of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. See e.g., Rollason, "Introduction," 5.

What is required for a positive view of human cultural activity to make an impact on creation is a commitment to diversity, to commonness, to "otherness," and to glorious cultural futures. Without a commitment to diversity, commonness, "otherness," and glorious cultural futures, and without a positive view of human cultural activity, the current state of Reformed cultural engagement will make a limited and declining impact on the rapidly evolving cultural contexts of our age. What is required is an approach that provides a better grasp of who God is across and throughout every cultural group in every society.

A positive view of human cultural activity will cause theologians to consider the whole scope of multiple Christian worldviews on the whole reality of "the other": their social contexts and backgrounds – their family, ethnicity, friendship groups, and other cultural influences. A positive view of human cultural activity will cause theologians to consider the impact of the Christian gospel on whole people groups and their complex tangle of indigenous and adopted social, historical, economic, political, and physical environments. It will lead to "otherness". Cultural renewal must affect every kind of context, process, and relationship that affects individuals and cultural groups, allowing them to imagine new futures for themselves. In turn, this will impact the relationships between different cultural groups which may ordinarily be characterized by domination, manipulation, and submission based on colonial discourses of power.

5.4.8 A vision of cultural renewal

Drawing on Kuyper's application of Calvinism, a positive view of human cultural activity leads to freedom of conscience for all individuals in all cultural groups, and where freedom of conscience flourishes there will be true equality.[758] This inevitably leads to a sense of "otherness". Furthermore, within Kuyper's sphere sovereignty there is the possibility that the cultural other – whether sphere, group, or individual – has not only their own sovereign calling and identity, but their futures are also unique and sovereign in their own right. A positive view of human cultural activity leads to a situation where renewal is possible for all cultural others. Cultural renewal as understood in terms of neo-Calvinist

[758] See e.g., Kuyper, *Our Program*, 69.

worldviews of creation theology and sphere sovereignty upholds the individuality of "the other", upholds the equality of cultural works across all spheres, and works towards a sense of "otherness" in all kinds of engagement.

5.5 Conclusion: Dialogue and the Cultural "Other"

If theological cultural engagement is to have any impact beyond the confines of the Reformed tradition it must reach out to the cultural "other" in their complexity. Cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism are "other" to each other, and in a sense the previous chapters have been leading to this point: a dialogue between both of these complex cultural "others". Inspired by Mouw's approach to interfaith dialogue and Tyler's likening of ethnography to "a co-operatively evolved text" I have integrated the priorities and concerns of both disciplines to create a textual dialogue.[759] From the perspective of interdisciplinary research, this idea of discourse resonates with the method of employing dialogical models through collaboration, communication, and the integration of observations, anecdotes, data, and narratives which together produce a resonance of a "culture."[760] In the same way, I have drawn together the stories, voices, data, practices, and knowledge from two disciplines which themselves are cultural others, to develop a dialogue which provides a new approach to theological cultural engagement.

5.5.1 Cultural complexity, multiple perspectives, and cultural renewal

Chapter One raised three areas for discussion in developing a new approach for theological cultural engagement: 1) Cultural analysis requires an acknowledgment that "culture" is both meaningful and undefinable; 2) Because "culture" is complex and requires multiple perspectives, theological cultural engagement must be contextual in nature, while remaining faithful to the tradition; 3) Theological cultural engagement that is founded upon a positive view of creation gives cultural works and human cultural development meaning and a future purpose. Through the textual dialogue developed in this chapter,

[759] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125. In some senses this thesis is an attempt to write about the "culture" of theological cultural engagement through "fragments of discourse" from the disciplines of neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology.

[760] Integration, collaboration, and communication are three key characteristics of cross-disciplinary research (CDR) identified by philosopher Michael O'Rourke in his description of interdisciplinary research methods. O'Rourke, "Comparing Methods," 5-6.

the first area raised issues of self-awareness and the indefinability of "culture", giving space to the reality of cultural complexity. The second area discussed how a multiperspectival approach to theological cultural engagement is necessary in approaching the cultural other, which again highlights cultural complexities as well as the sovereignty of the cultural other. In the third discussion area, the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology demonstrated that God's plans and purposes for the world include human cultural development, and the neo-Calvinism vision of cultural renewal is for the purpose of guiding creation towards fulfilling these purposes. These three discussion areas have formed the foundation of a dialogue between two distinct and different disciplines to further develop a new approach to theological cultural engagement that upholds the complexity and sovereignty of the cultural other.

5.5.2 Continuing internal renewal

This dialogue between two complex, cultural "others" has also demonstrated that if a renewed approach Christian cultural engagement is to have any lasting impact upon the cultural other then it must be characterized in two ways. Firstly, ongoing renewal must also be at the heart of the theological tradition. Self-awareness and critical reflection need to reach deep and wide within neo-Calvinism as a discreet theological movement and extend further into the Reformed tradition. A theological tradition is a sphere, a cultural world, in and of itself. It is not static and unchanging; to believe so is to deny the reality of cultural complexity. Theologians within the sphere may think of their tradition as bounded but it comes under the same pressures to conform and change, to either dominate or be dominated, and to become fractured. Any theological tradition must recognise this but rather than seek independence from other spheres, it must be able to both discern its own irreducible identity as well as its position in relation to other theological traditions, and other spheres of knowledge.[761] This is the path to continual renewal within the Reformed tradition. It must apply self-awareness and mulitperspectivalism to itself. All cultural worlds are interconnected regardless of choice, and all cultural worlds

[761] Mouw makes the point that seeing the positives in other theological traditions and perspectives can often provide correctives to one's own theological tradition. Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, 118.

are continually in flux as they relate to and are influenced by other cultural worlds. To recognise this, to accept, and to be changed by diversity of all kinds, interdisciplinarity, ecumenism, multiple ethnic voices, and to discern one's own place within them, is a healthy and necessary path to renewal.

5.5.3 Pragmatically engaging the cultural other

Secondly, if a new dynamic of theological cultural engagement is to have an impact on the cultural other, and achieve cultural renewal in the process, it must move from the realm of dialogue into a more pragmatic approach. Discussing cultural complexity and self-awareness, the need to hold multiple perspectives and contextualise theological engagement, and creation theology and cultural renewal must evolve into a more systematic framework to have usefulness in approaching the cultural other. The following chapter will lay the foundation for a more systematic approach which build on the three discussion areas of this dialogue. However, in keeping with the ethos of continual renewal any systematic approach requires flexibility to be built into it from the start. This will allow the dialogue between cultural anthropological and neo-Calvinist voices to be ongoing and create space for further evolution as new insights develop in both disciplines.[762]

[762] This is in keeping with Robbins' exhortation to continue collaborations between theology and anthropology that allow the awkwardness between the two different disciplines to be productive. Robbins, "Afterword," 336.

Chapter Six: Towards a Renewal of Christian Cultural Engagement in the Reformed Tradition

6.1 Introduction: A Renewed Approach

What does an effective and meaningful theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition look like, one that takes seriously the complexities of cultural realities and leads to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement? This is the question at the heart of this thesis.[763] To answer this question, I have engaged with a faithful reading of Kuyper and the neo-Calvinist theologians influenced by him, and with contemporary issues concerning "culture" from the field of cultural anthropology. This engagement led to the development of a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology regarding the following areas: 1) the need for those who write about "culture" to be culturally self-aware, and to uphold cultural complexity by avoiding catch-all definitions of "culture"; 2) the responsibility of anthropologists and theologians to consider multiple perspectives at the same time when engaging with various cultural contexts; 3) the difference it can make to the complex, cultural "other" if theologians operate with a positive view of human cultural activity. These priorities form the foundation for a new approach to the cultural "other". This chapter is concerned with a more systematic development of these areas for the practice of theological cultural engagement. [764]

6.1.1 Expanding the priorities of the dialogue

The previous chapter was concerned with integrating insights from neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology in a textual dialogue to establish the priorities for a new approach to Christian cultural engagement. In this chapter I will expand these priorities summarized above into three ideas which will form

[763] In the introduction I stated that the problem with theological cultural engagement in the broad Reformed tradition is that it lacks multiple perspectives when it comes to applying the tradition's theological truths to diverse cultural situations. I gave three examples of this problem in the work of Reformed scholars Daniel Strange, Don Carson, and Ted Turnau. Their work demonstrates a cultural engagement that is conducted solely through the lens of (their understanding of) Reformed theology.

[764] This is in line with Kuyper's application of Calvinism which was intensely practical. His achievements in politics and education, along with his theological and journalistic writing and public speeches demonstrate that his commitment was not to a theology to be kept within the walls of the institutional church, but a practical theology designed for cultural renewal. In his words, Calvinism "also meets every required condition for the advancement of human development to a higher stage." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 25.

the basis for a renewed approach to the complex, cultural "other": 1. Cultural worlds: Meaningful and Indefinable; 2. Multiplexity: Contextual and Faithful; 3. Creation: Cultivation and Harvest. I have deliberately chosen terms which demonstrate an integration of ideas from the voices within neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology, and which do justice to the individual sovereignty of both disciplines which stand as each other's cultural other.[765]

6.1.2 Fluid and dynamic

This chapter intends to demonstrate what a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement may look like in more systematic and pragmatic terms, while retaining a fluidity to uphold the fluctuating nature of cultural complexity. A need for fluidity arises from the idea that in ethnographic terms any account of an interaction with a cultural group must be subject to the fluctuations and indefinability of "culture." In this regard each dynamic area of this new approach must adapt and change emphasis according to context.[766] For example, it may be appropriate to emphasise the multiplex nature of a specific theological cultural interaction and tackle the tension between theological faithfulness and contextuality.[767] In this instance the other two concepts (Cultural Worlds and Creation) will lie somewhat in the background; ever present and poised to move forwards in emphasis either in a different circumstance or even in the same cultural interaction at a different time. There may also be theological cultural engagements which call for all three concepts to be held in tension simultaneously. This is all to demonstrate that the business of renewing Christian cultural engagement must involve a commitment to continual self-reflection, and the ability to bend under the pressure of cultural worlds which are always in flux, while keeping a theological integrity in place.

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[765] This is because the two disciplines disagree on "fundamental issues." Robbins, "Afterword," 335-336.

[766] Kuyper's sphere sovereignty lays the foundation for this interrelatedness: notwithstanding the independent life pertaining to the individual spheres, Kuyper asserts that "all together they form the life of creation, in accord with the ordinances of creation, and therefore are organically developed." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 68.

[767] An example of this is found in Keller's three practical approaches for integrative ministries in the area of justice and mercy: Relief, Development, and Reform. This kind of ministry requires a multiperspectival approach, holding all three approaches in tension at the same time while also remaining faithful to biblical and ecclesiological principles. Keller, *Center Church*, 325-326.

In addition, the three dynamic areas of this new approach may also be viewed as being always in motion; specifically, moving forward. For example, establishing that cultural worlds are both meaningful and indefinable at the same time – the first area – inevitably moves forward to a multiplex approach to theological cultural engagement because it demands holding more than one perspective simultaneously. Yet there is a theological end point implied in these areas, which is in some respects the *a priori* of theological cultural engagement: that of the purpose and future of creation.[768] This is reflected in the third area which deals with the harvest of cultural works that have emerged from the meaningful and indefinable multiple cultural worlds of the first area. In this sense, there is a continual motion to these areas, similar to the continual motion of cultural complexity, but this motion has an element of moving forward which is made distinct by its relationship with neo-Calvinist theology.

6.1.3 Dynamic formation

A systematic approach to theological cultural engagement even with the caveat of maintaining fluidity and a sense of dynamism and complexity, is nevertheless in danger of being confined to a theoretical theological cultural engagement with a theoretical cultural other. To combat this, and provide a further distinction to *this* approach, I will weave the idea of theological formation into each area. Just as ethnographers bring their own experiences and cultural influences to bear on their anthropological encounters, so theologians bring their theological, cultural, spiritual heritages and influences to bear on all kinds of theological cultural engagement. What better way to engage in a meaningful way than through hearts, minds, and wills which have been formed by the dynamic areas in this new approach?[769] If a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology is able to offer a new way of engaging theologically with cultural worlds, of speaking with integrity about cultural changes, and of acting with theological faithfulness and hope in the midst of fluctuating cultural processes,

[768] A Kuyperian reading of cultural engagement always leads to the end point of renewal and transformation. In Kuyper's view, everything that has enriched the earth, including cultural works, will be gathered into a new heaven and new earth. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 550-551.

[769] Kuyper explains that those "movements in history" which have been the most profound are those which were grounded in personal experience. For him, this should be rooted in prayer which unites the individual to God by the Holy Spirit. This personal encounter with God should be the foundation for the whole of life. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 11.

then theologians need to be formed by the qualities of justice, humility, hospitality, and mercy, the justification for which will emerge through the following three areas of renewal. Mouw suggests that such formation is necessary in how Christians formulate their theology; that it should focus on being "a how-to-*be* rather than a how-to-*do*."[770] This is precisely the reason for including formation in this chapter.

6.1.4 Towards a change of heart

Widely, formation is increasingly seen as essential to ethical debates, and within the sphere of neo-Calvinism itself authors such as James K.A. Smith and Matthew Kaemingk, amongst others, stress the importance of a change of heart, not just of mindset in matters of theology.[771] These important considerations illustrate the need for theological and anthropological concepts to become internalised and acted upon through an exercise of will, and in theological terms this calls for some kind of formation. This formation will reflect "otherness" and "commonness" which are both key concerns of cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism. To aid this pursuit of formation I will refer at times Bavinck's *Sacrifice of Praise* which is a series of theological meditations on the Lord's Supper. I have chosen this work particularly for two reasons. Firstly, Kuyper viewed the institutional church, with her ordinances and sacraments, as the "base of operations" for Christ's people.[772] This was because his view of "the marketplace of the world" was of a battlefield, and Christians need to be built up and strengthened for this battle within the safety of the institutional church, which includes feeding on the Lord's Supper.[773]

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[770] Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful*, 54.

[771] For example, in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, the first in his *Cultural Liturgies* trilogy, James K.A. Smith suggests that all Christian education is about formation. Education does not exist primarily to deliver information but to form worldviews and desires; it is not primarily an exercise of the mind but of the heart. This formation begins intentionally in worship. By extension of this argument, theology as a form of Christian education must be focussed towards forming not just thought patterns but heart patterns, belief *and* behaviour. See e.g., James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 17-18ff. Neo-Calvinist Matthew Kaemingk draws on this idea in his chapter on "Pluralism and Worship" in which he explores "how the rituals and shared experiences of Christian worship can form a citizen with the habits, virtues, and affections she will need to contribute to a fight for Christian pluralism." Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 202.

[772] Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries," 397.

[773] "Far from being that battlefield itself, the church is rather like the army tent of the Lord where soldiers strengthen themselves before that battle, where they treat their wounds after the battle, and where one who has become "prisoner by the sword of the Word" is fed at the table of the Lord." Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 22.

Kuyper understood that the inner life of a person would affect their outward actions; using the terminology of formation, each Christian needed to be formed within the life of the institutional church, with the confession of the church firmly fixed in every heart and mind.[774]

Secondly, I have chosen this work to aid an understanding of formation in theological cultural engagement because of the way Bavinck handles the tensions between the two realities of diversity and universality contained within the Christian church's confession at the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition. This work by Bavinck helps to demonstrate how the concerns of both cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism may be brought together in a manner which works out into individual and corporate formation. In turn it will enhance the formation in theological cultural engagement that springs from the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology by creating a posture of approaching the cultural other. Holding together universality and diversity in the Lord's Supper provides further support for a multiperspectival Christian cultural engagement that makes room for cultural complexity. In Kuyperian terms, the holding together of universality and diversity is found in Christ, just as nature and grace and all things in creation are united in him; therefore, all formation into a renewal of cultural engagement must be distinctly Christological.[775]

6.1.5 "A co-operatively evolved text"

The idea of a new approach for theological cultural engagement emerging from a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology grew out of Mouw's commitment to dialogue in the neo-Calvinist tradition, as well as anthropologist Stephen Tyler's reference to "fragments of discourse" which lead to "a co-operatively evolved text."[776] Tyler was referring to ethnography,

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[774] Kuyper was unabating in his pursuit for purity within the institutional church because it is the church as institute that will attract others to the light of Christ, and blaze outwards affecting all spheres of society. See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 195.

[775] With reference to Bavinck and spiritual formation, Bartholomew describes his commitment to imitating Christ in every area of life: "True imitation, for Bavinck, involves being conformed to the image of Christ." Bartholomew, *Contours*, 318.

[776] Quoted throughout this thesis, Tyler writes: "A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect." Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125. It is a statement in keeping with the reality that "cultures" do not remain static and are not easily defined. Rather, cultural groups may be viewed and interacted with by

defending the view that writing about "culture" always results in writing that "culture" into existence. Through the traditional approaches to cultural anthropology, ethnographers would act as decoders of that "culture",[777] impartial observers who stand outside of that "culture" and act as interpreters, translators, and ultimate definers of that "culture." As described in chapter three, the "writing culture" debate of the 1970s centred around the deconstruction of these traditional methods and attitudes, and the subsequent demythologising of the status of ethnographers.

6.1.6 To gain a better picture: cultural anthropology as a corrective lens

As Tyler suggests, ethnographic accounts of cultural groups are mere poetic evocations of the things they are attempting to describe because they cannot exhaustively describe or define and entire "culture." To gain a better picture of a cultural group and the structures, belief systems, interactions, expectations, and artefacts produced by the members of that cultural group, and to honour the shifting nature of all of these, *many* different texts (Tyler's "fragments of discourse") are required.[778] Even then, this "co-operatively evolved text" must submit to the fickle fluctuating structures within and without that cultural group. Hence why Tyler likens ethnographic accounts to poems: evocative, and illusory at times, their function is to inspire the idea of encounters with a cultural group, or – more likely – several cultural groups at once.[779] Tyler's description is not an exhaustive statement on the nature of ethnography – that would be self-defeating - but it is an important comment regarding the reliance upon traditional methods which simplify otherwise complex cultural interactions,

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adopting diverse perspectives, or "fragments of discourse." The end result gives the person viewing or interacting a sense of that cultural group without binding it too tightly to a definition.

[777] For example, Lévi-Strauss's idea of the ethnographer as an engineer taking a scientific, empirical approach to anthropology. See e.g., Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology*, 16.

[778] Kuyper confirms this multiplicity in cultural worlds: "There is no uniformity among men, but endless multiformity." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16.

[779] Clifford also alludes to poetry in describes ethnography as "cultural *poesis.*" Clifford, "Introduction," 16. This is not to say that ethnographic accounts are false: true and false or not appropriate categories to apply to poetry, let alone ethnography which is fundamental relative to the ethnographer and her audience. For example, the poet William Wordsworth describes poetry in the following way, which bears a resemblance to Tyler's description of ethnography: "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind." William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," The Harvard Classics, accessed January 03, 2019, http://faculty.csbsju.edu/dbeach/beautytruth/Wordsworth-PrefaceLB.pdf.

generalize important cultural variants, and essentialize evolving cultural structures.

Mouw describes how through dialogue with other, different, Christian traditions he is able to see "correctives" to his own tradition.[780] I am extending this analogy to include a dialogue with cultural anthropology. If the problem with other approaches to theological cultural engagement is a lack of multiple perspectives that uphold both complexity and sovereignty, then cultural anthropology helps to explain why this approach is limiting and ineffective. In Chapter Four I argued from Aguilar that there is no such thing as "culture" and that the artificial boundaries that ethnographers, sociologists and others have placed around cultural groups have led to misunderstanding, xenophobia and oppression.[781] Artificial boundaries can lead to a separation that goes beyond healthy distinctions and causes groups and individuals to consider each other as "the other" in a hostile sense, thereby disregarding the reality of cultural complexity.[782] Such hostility inevitably results in a desire to decode, interpret, and simplify in order to defend one's own perceived boundaries, and can result in separation, coercion, manipulation or elimination of "the other". To an extent, cultural anthropology can provide a "corrective" to neo-Calvinism in this area in order to uphold the complexity, as well as the uniqueness of the cultural "other" especially in contexts where that cultural "other" has been previously excluded and treated as less than human.

6.2 Cultural Worlds: Meaningful and Indefinable

A cultural world can be anything that combines common beliefs, ideas, values and practices. I am applying this phrase to groups that range, for example, from teenage friendship groups to ethnic minorities. I am choosing to use this phrase

[780] Mouw, *Calvinism*, 118-119.

[781] Binding a person or a social group to a specific, named "culture" flattens out the complexities of individuals and their relationships. See e.g., Aguilar, "Changing Models," 307.

[782] Aguilar highlights this point in his description of the dialogue between the American monk Thomas Merton and the 14th Dalai Lama: one of the uniting factor in their relationship, based upon Buddhist and Ignatian practices, is the commitment to compassion and hospitality towards "the other" and the eradication of hostility that is born from a fear of difference. Aguilar writes: "Merton's challenge is to destroy once and for all that category of 'otherness' and to replace it with an ongoing commonality that surpasses all differences and that is dictated by a daily search for the spiritual and for the contemplative experience of a common 'otherness' in every stranger." Mario I. Aguilar, "The Jesuits in Tibet at the Time of the VI and the VII Dalai Lamas," *The Tibet Journal* 35, no.3 (2010): 72.

rather than “cultures” or “sub-cultures” because, as mentioned above, in some respects cultural anthropology is moving away from applying the blanket term “culture” to different groups. This was discussed in length in Chapter Four. In fact, all cultural worlds are made up of different micro cultural worlds and are influenced by other independent cultural worlds. Kuyper understood this complexity: “The cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life.”[783] For example, in a local cultural community such as a church congregation, there will be many similarities between members, but one nuclear family in that congregation may look quite different to another. If we call each nuclear family, or each friendship group, a cultural world then we can see that the overall cultural world of the congregation is made up of many diverse cultural worlds. All of those cultural worlds bring other outside cultural influences to bear upon the greater cultural world of which they are members. However, it is still possible to identify specific cultural worlds, which once would have been termed “cultures” and “sub-cultures” and these worlds are the subject of this section.

6.2.1 Cultural worlds are meaningful

It has been clear from the cultural anthropological research in this thesis that cultural worlds are both identifiable as distinct from each other *and* in a state of continual flux. This raises two ideas which need to be held in tension with each other: for the purposes of this chapter I have called them meaningful and indefinable. In part, I have borrowed the idea of meaningfulness from the neo-Calvinist idea that social institutions (other types of cultural worlds) have irreducible identities.[784] Cultural worlds have within them an inherent identity which attributes to them certain identifiable characteristics making them distinct from other worlds. As described in chapter two, these irreducible identities should protect different (often weaker) cultural worlds from collapsing or being

[783] Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 467-468.

[784] In my review of Jonathan Chaplin in Chapter Two I refer to his use of the term “irreducible identities” pertaining to social institutions. This irreducibility, which has its origin in Dooyeweerd’s ideas of social theory, permeates society, resulting in pluralism; it forms the foundation for public justice, civil life, and in the language of this thesis, for cultural diversity. For example, he describes Christian pluralism - as an alternative to other social pluralist theories – as follows: “Civil society grounded in distinctive understandings of the irreducibly diverse possibilities of created human nature.” Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 16.

dominated by other (often stronger) cultural worlds.[785] For example, this meaningfulness may guard against the unreasonable assimilation of minority groups into a dominant political, social, and cultural group.[786] It protects cultural diversity and pluralism, gives dignity to traditional customs, and suggests that there is another way for cultural worlds to live and work together in society without embracing absolute hegemony. Because of these irreducible identities I am saying that all cultural worlds are meaningful in their own right by virtue of their distinction from each other.

6.2.2 Meaningfulness and common grace

There is a second component to this concept of meaningfulness: common grace.[787] To affirm the existence of irreducible identities and use it as a reason for the preservation of cultural diversity in society is to imply that there are good things to be found in different cultural worlds. Food, architecture, dance, music, and even the intricate nature of family relationships is all meaningful and promote the distinctiveness of different cultural worlds. To affirm the value and meaning of these elements of cultural worlds is to promote the welfare, for example, of indigenous communities.[788] Entwined with this idea of "good" in cultural worlds is also a sense of justice. When the distinctiveness of a (weaker) cultural group is not honoured by another (stronger) cultural group it results in attitudes that treat members of cultural worlds oppressively and inhumanly. Slavery, violence towards women, persecution, and genocide are all consequences of a denial of meaningfulness of all types of cultural worlds, and

[785] Kuyper describes this danger of encroachment of one sphere upon another as disrupting the "whole operation" of organic society. For him the State's role was to regulate the operation of the spheres so that this encroachment did not happen. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

[786] For example, in Kaemingk's treatment of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands he describes how a contemporary liberal narrative is aimed towards a choice for Muslims either to be assimilated into Dutch society, or risk social marginalization. See e.g., Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 67.

[787] Here I am referring to the general idea of common grace discussed in Chapter One with all its difficulties and contradictions: "neither an everlasting grace nor a saving grace, but a temporal grace *for the restraint of ruin that lurks within sin*." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 9 (author's italics).

[788] A "common grace" example of this is the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues established in 2000. It works with other similar UN groups to raise the profile of indigenous communities across the world and to uphold the 2007 UN Declaration of on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. United Nations, "United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues," Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Indigenous Peoples, accessed January 07, 2019, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/unpfii-sessions-2.html.

the dignity of the members of those cultural worlds.[789] Instead, embracing the irreducible identities of cultural worlds, and affirming their good elements, guards against injustice, domination, and political powerplays, and celebrates cultural pluralism and equality.

Finally, inherently caught up in this idea of common grace within cultural worlds is the existence of the antithesis and the theological belief that all our cultural worlds are affected by sin.[790] This is what leads to oppression and domination, but it also leads to a suppression of the knowledge of God the Creator.[791] "Goodness" is therefore qualified by the Reformed theological doctrine of total (but not absolute) depravity; qualified but not nullified.[792] By extension, "meaningfulness" is also qualified. Because of common grace, neither "goodness" nor "meaningfulness" are nullified.

A further extension of this idea of the meaningfulness of cultural worlds concerns the contribution that culturally different Christian groups can equally make to theological understanding, and the global Church's understanding of God as he is revealed in creation and in Scripture. According to Bavinck, the image of God is revealed through humanity, including its history and development; yet much more is the global church who realises the fullness of the image of God as it is united under one head – Christ – in order to reveal God to the world. [793] Meaningfulness in this context of diverse *Christian* cultural

[789] For example, violence against women as a weapon of war is reported to encourage soldiers to fight, yet it is a deliberate denial of the meaningfulness of cultural worlds (being an attempt to wipe out race and ethnicity), and an obvious denial of the dignity of the female members of those cultural worlds. See e.g., Storkey, *Scars*, 151.

[790] Kuyper explains that Calvin viewed all kinds of evil in the world as stemming from the point of the curse which followed humanity's sin. Kuyper describes this as "all that is bothersome, disturbing, or dangerous from the perspective of our body or of the world in the presently existing order of things." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 307-308.

[791] Common grace curbs this suppression to an extent because it makes it still possible for human beings to gain some knowledge of God. Kuyper insists this knowledge is not salvific but that fact that there is still a remnant of knowledge in the world and in the heart of humans, points to the existence of common grace. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 489-491.

[792] Deciding what constitutes "good" is at the heart of humanity's sin. Kuyper explains that, following the eating of the fruit from the tree of good and evil, humanity makes its own assessment of what is good and evil rather than submitting to God's determining of those categories. The conflict between these two assessments resulted in the conscience. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 242-243. However, Kuyper explains that common grace restrains the extremity of humanity choosing evil over what God deems good: "The light of truth has definitely not retreated altogether but has continued to shine. It is strictly due to us that the light does not penetrate to our soul's eye. Common grace is present, but we have rejected it." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 488-489.

[793] As described in chapter one, Bavinck affirms the cultural development of all humanity as unfolding the image of God in creation but is clear that it in the end it will be the

worlds means that Christians may legitimately approach theological ideas and issues through the lenses of other cultural communities, thus enriching the global body of Christ.

6.2.3 Cultural worlds are indefinable

So far, I have described what I mean by cultural worlds and the importance of understanding these cultural worlds as meaningful. However, if cultural worlds are only meaningful in their distinction from each other it could give rise to undue separation between cultural worlds as individual groups vie for prominence and ultimately dominance.[794] This separation would breed, and indeed *has* bred sectarianism, tribalism, and socio-political structures like apartheid.[795] How can a new approach to cultural engagement guard against this degeneration while sustaining the vital importance of meaningfulness in cultural worlds? The answer to this lies in holding in tension the idea that cultural worlds are also indefinable**.** They are not ultimately fixed and bounded objects and therefore an attitude of sectarianism and protectionism is ultimately futile.

Indefinability does not mean that there is nothing concrete that one can say about a cultural world; the fact that spheres are sovereign in their own right with their own irreducible identities, guards against this. However, by abandoning the generalised term “cultures” (following Aguilar), cultural worlds or spheres do not become entrenched in separation and difference.[796] If it is true that human beings share similarities but do not share “cultures” then it becomes impossible

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purified church that will be “the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 2*, 576-578.

[794] This would, in Kuyper’s words, disrupt “the whole operation” of organic society. Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 468. Nevertheless, as described in Chapter One, the interpretation of Kuyper’s emphasis on distinct spheres have led to separations between cultural groups, particularly in South Africa. This is in part due to the implication in his language that certain ethnicities are inferior to others. For example, Kuyper is bold in his statement that in refusing to intermingle with other tribal groups (something he views as necessary for the development of humanity) “the Mongolian race has held itself apart, and in its isolation has bestowed no benefits upon our race at large.” Kuyper, *Lectures*, 23.

[795] This is a consequence of labelling cultural communities thereby binding them to a particular history, territory, and perceived character which may sow the seeds of discrimination; for example, the use of “Hutu” and “Tutsi” before the Rwandan genocide. See e.g., Mario I. Aguilar, *Theology, Liberation, and Genocide* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 19-20.

[796] This is especially true of people groups which in binding them to specific nations and territories may put them in danger of discrimination and genocide. See e.g., Aguilar, “Changing Models,” 308.

to refer to “cultures” at all.[797] This is what makes all cultural worlds ultimately indefinable, and acts as a safeguard against introspective self-absorption.[798] Instead, self-awareness emerges as members of different cultural worlds become attuned to the fluctuating boundaries of the spheres they and others inhabit. For members of theological and ecclesiological worlds this means that while their spheres are sovereign in their own right, the boundaries of those spheres are subject to continual changing influences. Fighting to maintain fixed boundaries is therefore a futile act and can cause arrogance, elitism, and hostility towards other cultural worlds. Instead, theological and ecclesiological worlds uphold their distinct identities without being sealed off from other spheres. This is why both meaningfulness *and* indefinability must be held in tension.[799]

6.2.4 Binding “evangelicals”

This is also why self-awareness has been a key feature in the dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. In fact, to deny that cultural worlds are in flux is also to deny their distinctive meaning: an example of this may be seen in the use of the word “evangelical” in North America in recent times. “Evangelical” no longer describes a meaningful expression of biblical Christianity, but a white, supremacist, political force. For example, in a private address to American evangelical leaders in 2018, the principal of Fuller Theological Seminary, Mark Labberton lamented the way in which evangelicalism has engaged with a variety of political issues. He writes: “Now on public display is an indisputable collusion between prominent evangelicalism and many forms of insidious, misogynistic, materialistic, and political power.” [800] “Evangelical” may now not be the most appropriate label to use because,

[797] Aguilar, “Changing Models,” 307.

[798] One of the defining characteristics of the cultural world of Calvinism is its ability to look beyond its immediate ecclesiastical context. While Kuyper, because he was a man of his time, did refer to specific “cultures” he also explained that because of common grace at work throughout the world, “the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate.” Kuyper, *Lectures*, 53.

[799] Every sphere must work with the other spheres in order for an organic society to work, meaning that while they are distinct, they cannot be sealed off, just as no area of one’s individual life may be sealed off under the sovereignty of Christ. See e.g., Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 489.

[800] Mark Labberton, “Political Dealing: The Crisis of Evangelicalism,” Fuller Theological Seminary, published April 20, 2018, https://www.fuller.edu/posts/political-dealing-the-crisis-of-evangelicalism/.

understood as a cultural world, “evangelicalism” has created fixed boundaries which have caused hostility towards other expressions of Christianity, hostility towards other political positions, and hostility towards members of its own world who have become uncomfortable with the label “evangelical” because of what it now means. An attempt to politically fix the boundaries of the American evangelical community has narrowed and undermined the meaning and distinctiveness of this cultural world.[801]

6.2.5 Commonness and distinctiveness: holding the tension

From the above example, it is clear that maintaining a healthy sense of indefinability about the boundaries of cultural worlds guards against the loss of distinct identities. Both indefinability and meaningfulness must be held in tension for the life of a diverse society where human beings inhabit multiple spheres. A rigid interpretation of sphere sovereignty forces fixed, immovable boundaries around spheres, leading to separation rather than distinction, and making it not only difficult, but theologically, socially, and perhaps legally impossible for one individual to move between spheres in society.[802] However, from an anthropological perspective, human beings belong to many cultural worlds at once, making cultural interactions complex and tangled. As we human beings pass through different cultural worlds, we pick up influences and drop them into other cultural worlds, causing continual change.[803] Kuyper’s idea of an organic society supports this. If, in his imagining of the operation of sphere sovereignty, the behaviour of an individual in one sphere (according to the nature of that sphere) was hermetically sealed off from the same individual’s

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[801] In contrast, in speaking about being a Calvinist and an evangelical, Mouw’s approach is to see beyond the boundaries of his tradition in order to see how it may be enriched by other Christian traditions. He refers to this as theological “messiness” but his approach preserves the distinctiveness of his tradition – Calvinist and evangelical – while at the same time not allowing the boundaries of that tradition to be irrevocably fixed. See e.g., Mouw, *Evangelical Civility*, 152.

[802] Mouw cites an example of a woman and a man who interact with each other within the context of three diverse spheres. According to the different identities of these spheres their relationship is expressed differently and appropriately for each distinct sphere. Any other behaviour would compromise the meaningfulness of the distinct cultural worlds. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 25-26. However, they are still the same people moving between spheres which would be impossible if one of those spheres was so separate from the others that it became the dominant sphere and hindered the relationship of both individuals in the other two spheres.

[803] Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life (1869),” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed., James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 34 (my italics). This “ever-varying” form extends from the snowflake to human spheres.

behaviour in a different sphere, there would be no sense of growth *together*. This is vital in rejecting a rigid and destructive interpretation of sphere sovereignty. Kuyper acknowledges that there is "an inexhaustible profusion of variations that strikes you in every domain of nature, in the *ever-varying* shape of a snowflake as well as in the endlessly differentiated form of flower and leaf." This challenges any notion of permanent separation that arises from distinctions between spheres.

The notions of commonness and distinctiveness aid this rejection of separation. Cultural worlds flow into and out from each other all the time, not in a way which ultimately dissolves their unique characteristics – their history, belief-systems, environmental practices etc – but in a way which allows for change and modification. A further way to consider this is in terms of holding commonness and distinctiveness in tension with each other; cultural worlds, because they are in relationship with other cultural worlds, share a commonality with those worlds that make fixed borders between them impossible to maintain. However, this does not minimise the fact that they are still distinct from other cultural worlds and can be recognised and identified apart from each other.[804]

6.2.6 Neo-Calvinism with cultural anthropology

In this section I have drawn on vocabulary used in both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. In describing cultural worlds as having irreducible identities and being meaningful in their own right I am directly referencing Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. In emphasising the ineffectiveness of using the term "cultures" and instead highlighting the fluid nature of the boundaries of cultural worlds I am directly referencing both Aguilar and Clifford. I am deliberately mixing the vocabulary from both disciplines to form a new understanding of theological cultural engagement. This new understanding can

[804] In an article in the Public Justice Review, Jonathan Chaplin expounds the implications for both commonness and difference between citizens in a civil society. The existence of "civic pluralism" in a democratic society poses dilemmas as citizens defend the common freedoms such pluralism brings, while having to live with some norms and laws which oppose different individual consciences. In bringing about civil justice in a civil society, Christians should lead the way as a minority group, and one way in which they may do this is by modelling how to disagree civilly. This is one relevant demonstration of the necessity of commonness and difference existing together. See e.g., Jonathan Chaplin, "Civic Pluralism and Minority Solidarity," *Public Justice Review* 4, no. 8 (2018): no pages, https://cpjustice.org/uploads/Chaplin2_FINAL_(1).pdf.

begin to form new attitudes and approaches through a shared vocabulary that describes cultural worlds as both meaningful and indefinable at the same time.

6.2.7 Forming the tension

However, while understanding this tension in practice is helped by a shared vocabulary; holding it as an attitude of mind and behaviour requires formation. For example, Bavinck describes the difficulty of holding two realities in tension within the context of the Lord's Supper: both the diversity and the unity of the Christian church in its confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.[805] He firstly puts forward the argument that diversity exists through error and unbiblical difference, yet any attempt to establish unity by force results in greater theological error, and compounds diversity.[806] Fixing boundaries around a confessional unity that is meant to once-and-for-all define the Christian church is a futile and illusory exercise. Instead Bavinck states that "in unity God loves diversity,"[807] meaning that in fact the two realities are in relation, not opposition, to each other. Ultimately this is a question of the tension between grace and nature, and how the two relate to each other; Bavinck argues that every human being will interpret this relationship differently.[808] There is one truth – that Jesus Christ is the Son of God – but that truth "reflects itself in the consciousness of man in very different ways. It is true, only one sun shines in the firmament but everyone sees it with his own eye."[809] Just as unity and diversity stand in relation, not opposition to each other, so do nature and grace through Jesus Christ. I suggest that the concepts of meaningfulness and indefinability are held together in relationship in the same way as nature and grace, and unity and

[805] There is irony in the face that as soon as the Christian church strove to articulate the central beliefs of the faith in a formal confession as a sign of unity, the confession then revealed the disunity and discord between Christians. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 66.

[806] Attempts to "preserve or even restore this very much desired unity in the Church of Christ, be it either by compulsory or by artificial means" have resulted in further splintering of the church into factions: "For he, who our of impartiality separates himself from all parties, stands in great danger of becoming the head of a new party himself." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 68.

[807] Diversity is not only a gift of God, not only visible in his creation, but a reflection of the glorious "infinite, rich essence of God" and a revelation of his "perfections and attributes." Because God is one, this diversity is inextricably bound to unity, showing that the two are not in opposition. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 70.

[808] Here, Bavinck explains that nature, having been "destroyed by sin" is recreated by grace. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 71.

[809] This diversity does not negate unity, but instead creates harmony. It is vital that the church holds onto this united harmony however much it is obscured by disunity. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 72.

diversity. Formation into the holding together of nature and grace, and of unity and diversity in confession, will help to hold together the nature of cultural worlds as I have outlined them in this renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

6.2.8 Unity reflected in multiple ways

For the purposes of this approach, the true confession described by Bavinck is the meaningfulness of the Christian church in unity (as a cultural world), but its indefinable diversity actually guarantees a better grasp of that confession in the end.[810] As Christians gather together to confess their faith and partake in the Lord's Supper, they are reminded of the multiple reflections of that one confession; for theological cultural engagement, we are reminded that there is a unity to cultural worlds which gives them meaning, while at the same time that meaning is reflected in multiple ways, resulting in indefinable boundaries. To be formed in this area is to become able to see, respond to, and engage with both realities at the same time. It is to pursue the belief formulated in the Belhar Confession that diversity in unity is possible:

> [T]hat this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.[811]

6.3 Multiplexity: Contextual and Faithful

In the previous chapter, the second dialogue question was concerned with the issue of holding multiple perspectives about different and diverse cultural worlds while remaining faithful to the Reformed tradition. I have expanded this discussion in forming a more systematic approach and called this idea multiplexity. I have chosen the word multiplex over complex because it better captures the multiplicity of the diversification of cultural interactions that needs

[810] For example, as mentioned before, a formal confession can highlight disunity and difference but as Bavinck explains, the actual lives of individual Christians highlight the unity and diversity present in the church as "a striking harmony." Bavinck wisely concludes: "The imperfect confession of the lips does not very often do justice to the faith of the heart." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 73.

[811] "The Confession of Belhar."

to be conveyed and considered in theological cultural engagement[812]. For example, in cultural engagement we move from awareness of self to consideration of "the other" and from awareness of "the other" to a sense of "otherness" in all kinds of cultural analysis.[813]

6.3.1 Multiplex theological cultural engagement is contextual

This second area has the subheading contextual and faithful. The contextualization of the Christian faith is a natural necessity when multiplexity is part of a renewal of cultural engagement because applying the truths of the Christian faith requires cultural adaptation.[814] However, just as the idea of meaning and indefinability need each other for balance and accountability in this approach, so contextualization will require faithfulness to the spirit of the tradition and vice versa to keep both areas accountable and balanced. Being contextual means stepping gently and patiently inside a cultural world to understand how the Christian faith, biblical theology, and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ may best find a home there, within the distinctiveness of that particular, sovereign context. It means that theologians take the claims of different cultural worlds seriously and on an equal footing with their own. Indiscriminately applying a narrative of idolatry is not contextualization, and the extreme outworking of this approach can have deadly results.[815] Understood in this way, contextualization is the hard work of making the gospel accessible across many cultural worlds at the same time.[816]

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[812] This relates to Kuyper's description of the "endless multiformity" and "infinite diversity" of creation. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16 and Kuyper, "Uniformity," 34.

[813] This "otherness" is an anthropological concept described in Chapter Three and relates to the ability to imagine ways in which "the other" lives and will live in the future beyond traditional cultural presuppositions. See e.g., Rollason, "Pacific Futures," 4.

[814] This was Kuyper's task and the continuing task of neo-Calvinism: to apply doctrine to each new generation. In Kuyper's words, "Calvinism is not dead…it still carries in its germ the vital energy of its glory days." Kuyper, *Lectures*, 27.

[815] Tshaka explains that the missionaries who brought Reformed theology to South Africa had no regard for traditional African "culture" in their version of contextualization, an approach which arguably put South Africa on a theological, ecclesial, and political trajectory to apartheid. Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed?" 4.

[816] "Pop culture" is a good example of the collision and interaction of many different cultural worlds. Treating it as a single object turns it into a bounded cultural world - from the perspective of the theologian at least – which, as a whole "culture", then necessitates the blanket application of Reformed theology in a manner which is imposing, invasive, and without distinctions. This approach leads to taking cultural artefacts out of their social contexts, to which I referred in the Introduction to this thesis. See e.g., Ted Turnau, *Popologetics*, 320.

6.3.2 African contextualisation and cultural complexity

A further application of "contextual" may be found in the reorientation of biblical theology from a typically Western context to a non-Western context such as post-colonial Africa. An African recontextualization of Christianity requires an application of Scripture to the complex and unique situation of African people and communities across the continent.[817] Raising a question such as, "what does it mean to be a Reformed Christian *and* African" can provide a helpful lens through which to view the wider issues of contextualization in this thesis. For example, how does one approach death as an African, with the superstitions, rituals and ceremonies surrounding the death of a loved one or ancestor seemingly at odds with biblical teaching?[818] If we understand the entire Christian world as one organic society then these kinds of questions promote the multiformity and variations required for that society to flourish.

Considering the outworking of the reorientation of biblical theology to the Africa situation may facilitate the right kind of questions in an inter-cultural context, for example in downtown Manhattan for the ministry of Redeemer Church.[819] However, again in keeping with the multiplex nature of theological engagement that this thesis is advocating, it would also be vital to address the plural cultural influences upon African societies.[820] Without this, the danger of separation which leads to segregation and inequality is always present. This situation is further complicated through the post-colonial nature of many African societies.

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[817] For example, theologian Samuel Waje Kunhiyop writes: "My own understanding of African Christian theology is that it should take the African situation seriously while seeking to be true to the explicit teachings of Scripture." Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Nairobi, Kenya: HippoBooks, 2012), xiv.

[818] Kunyihop suggests that these rituals be Christianized where possible and cites other occasions where the musical instruments that are traditionally used in ancestor worship have been brought into the arena of worship of the Christian God. Kunyihop, *African Christian Theology*, 233.

[819] Keller describes how Christianity is multi-ethnic because faith in Christ relativizes race and cultural backgrounds. This is the foundation for relationships between cultural worlds: one's ethnic identity no longer ultimately defines a person because their faith in Christ now defines them and gives them an ultimate commonality and equality with all peoples of the Christian faith. Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2018), 177.

[820] For example, social ethicist Peter Paris writes: "cultural pluralism constitutes the warp and woof of Africa, which comprises more than two thousand ethnic groups. In many parts of Africa, one is rarely farther than a few kilometers from another language group. Like all trading centers, in Africa the marketplace regularly unites much of that pluralism in a common pursuit while respecting ethnic differences." Paris, "The African and African-American Understanding of Our Common Humanity," 277. Such cultural pluralism, while not without its conflicts in many parts of Africa, is an irreducible part of African identity.

Neo-Calvinist scholar Gideon Strauss explains that there is no pure "African culture" to which the continent may return, but although any attempt to construct such an ideal will be tainted with imperialism, a recognition of the influences of multiple traditions may provide meaning for the way forward. Including neo-Calvinism, with its complicated history in South Africa, in this mix of traditions, he writes:

> No-one is captive in a single, monolithic tradition; we all inhabit a variety of diverse yet related traditions at once: inherited habits of the imagination, for instance, influence one's life in ways different from habits of justice, love, or faith. If we are to live with integrity, we must be aware of and knowledgeable about the traditions which we inhabit. Traditions have a certain authority: insofar as they measure up to their God-given meaning and serve as a blessing to those they enhabit, they deserve our conforming yet renewing loyalty.[821]

Strauss's statement here is compatible with the demand from the discipline of cultural anthropology to be constantly self-aware of the influences that one brings to the task of engaging with cultural groups whether as an ethnographer or a theologian. His statement also provides a bridge back from the specifically African cultural context to the wider issue of contextualization in this thesis. Reformed theologians must be knowledgeable about the tradition(s) *they* inhabit before they consider how to engage with the inherited traditions (and cultural influences) inhabited by others. Cultivating attitudes of "justice, love" and "faith" may provide a way forward for a recontextualization of Reformed theology in diverse ways and in complex contexts.

6.3.3 Multiplex theological cultural engagement is faithful

Nevertheless, there is another challenge in this quotation from Gideon Strauss in the line, "Traditions have a certain authority: insofar as they measure up to their God-given meaning." While the fact of multiplexity in theological cultural engagement requires that it be contextual in its outworking, there is also the requirement for faithfulness to the Reformed tradition "insofar as it measures up to its God-given meaning." Neo-Calvinism owes its existence to this tradition, and therefore this thesis would be moving in an inappropriate direction if it failed

[821] Strauss, "Footprints in the Dust," 8. This is, in part, an explanation of his loyalty to his own tradition of neo-Calvinism.

to recognise the authority of that tradition. In the previous chapter, the second dialogue question raised this issue, and in my constructed responses to this question I demonstrated how holding multiple perspectives is faithful to the idea of sphere sovereignty in neo-Calvinism and explained how sphere sovereignty is compatible with the Reformed tradition.[822]

However, through the lens described above by Strauss that traditions are authoritative "insofar as they measure up to their God-given meaning," I contend that there is a further kind of faithfulness that is required for theological cultural engagement. In the previous chapter four characteristics were discussed as being integral to a different kind of theological cultural engagement. These characteristics comprise justice and fairness for all in all cultural worlds,[823] mercy and compassion to those who are "other" to "us",[824] hospitality and generosity in attitude towards other cultural – and other faith - communities,[825] and humility with self-awareness of our cultural influences.[826] I am using these characteristics which display integrated attributes from both neo-Calvinist theology and cultural anthropology, to provide a measure how far

[822] As explained in Chapter One, Kuyper locates sphere sovereignty in Calvinist concept of divine sovereignty. See e.g., Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 480.

[823] In Chapter One I referred to Kuyper's attitude to the overseas colonies of the Netherlands. Although he was a man writing in his time, and never advocated the giving up of those colonies in the name of justice, he believed that the Netherlands had a Christian responsibility of justice to the peoples of those colonies. He abhorred the thought not only of individual slavery, for example, but especially of national slavery and exploitation. Kuyper, *Our Program*, 300-301.

[824] Louise Lawrence's description of "the other" is mentioned above and in previous chapters and is partly in view here. However, a different view comes from neo-Calvinism: Mouw describes the difficult necessity of maintaining kindness in encounters with people who are so "other" to us that their values are fundamentally opposed to ours. In these situations, when it seems right to "move beyond civility" with others, Christians are called to remember that all human beings are made in God's image and redemption and grace are possible for all. See e.g, Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 146-147.

[825] This hospitality and generosity not only to other cultural worlds but also other, different faith communities is founded upon a belief that "an operation of God's Holy Spirit and his common grace is discernible not only in science and art, morality and law, but also in the religions." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 1*, 319.

[826] Notwithstanding the emphasis upon ethnographic self-awareness in the discipline of cultural anthropology (as expounded in Chapter Three), humility towards our fellow human beings of all different ethnic and social backgrounds is intrinsic to Calvinism, and neo-Calvinism. Kuyper insisted that because every human being lives their life openly before God that no one person (or groups and nations) "as creatures of God, and as lost sinners, have no claim whatsoever to lord over one another." Because of this, *all* human beings are equal to each other, and equal before God. This must extend into all cultural engagements. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 16-17.

the Reformed tradition lives up to "its God-given meaning" in theological cultural engagement.[827]

6.3.4 A different view of faithfulness

This is a different view of "faithfulness" to one which merely espouses a blind allegiance to a tradition.[828] Instead, I am using the word faithful to refer to the consistent upholding of the four characteristics of justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility, as outlined above. I introduced these four characteristics in Chapter One, explaining that they may be drawn implicitly or explicitly from Kuyperian ideas and subsequent neo-Calvinist developments. I have chosen these specific words because of the areas of discussion they represent: respectively, freedom of conscience as espoused by Kuyper with the idea of non-bounded "cultures" in cultural anthropology, the idea of "otherness" [829] in cultural anthropology with a neo-Calvinist understanding of "commonness",[830] common grace and the ideas of cultural pluralism in both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology,[831] and finally ethnographic self-awareness with the relationship between the antithesis and special grace in neo-Calvinism.[832]

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[827] All these characteristics may be summed up by Kuyper's statement: "No, what we want is equal rights for all, whatever their situation or religion." Kuyper, "Calvinism," 315. For Kuyper, democratic liberty was founded in Calvinism.

[828] At the beginning of *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, Mouw describes a scene from the film *Hardcore* where a Calvinist (Jake) confronts a troubled young woman (Nikki) with the five doctrines of his tradition (with Mouw using the anacronym TULIP). Later in the book Mouw envisages how the conversation should have proceeded, with the Calvinist relating to the woman in terms of God's love and the assurance of eternal life through Christ. He writes: "This is what Jake should have talked about with Nikki. And the TULIP doctrines, if they were to come into the picture at all for Nikki, could be dealt with much further down the line." Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, 109. This is an example of the damage a blind allegiance to a tradition can do in engagement with others, and an example from Mouw of what true faithfulness looks like.

[829] I have taken this concept from Joel Robbins' article concerning the relationship between anthropology and theology as described in Chapter 3. However, a type of "otherness" is implied throughout the neo-Calvinist belief in common grace and its outworking in matters of public justice and freedom of conscience.

[830] Although the idea of a human commonness in neo-Calvinism is often first attributed to Schilder (as explained in Chapter One), Bavinck affirms a "solidarity of the human race." This unity is apparent in all things psychological, physiological, cultural, ethnic, and religious, despite the diversity and disarray also present among humankind. See e.g., Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 2*, 562.

[831] This is in reference, mainly, to a Kuyperian understanding of common grace as described in Chapter One, which underpins the idea of "pluriformity" and plurality in cultural development in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.

[832] In footnote 40 above, I quoted Kuyper's insistence upon the equality of humankind as together being "lost sinners." This demonstrates how the antithesis guards against any kind of superiority in cultural engagement. It can also be applied to the idea of self-awareness in cultural engagement. Being aware of the cultural influences that theologians bring to their

What does faithfulness to these four characteristics of justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility look like in a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement that takes seriously the complexities of the cultural "other"? I will answer this by returning to two themes already discussed in this thesis: an anthropological concern for "otherness" and a neo-Calvinist concern for "commonness". Firstly, I will place "otherness" in anthropology alongside the idea of specificity in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty to build a platform for engaging theologically with multiple cultural worlds. Secondly, I will consider how civility in the public square between multiple cultural communities can inspire a mutual regard for "commonness" and a platform for a deeper engagement that includes an ability to both give to and receive from multiple cultural communities.

This deeper engagement does not negate the obligation for theological cultural engagement to remain faithful to its own sphere; in this case, to the Reformed tradition.[833] This deeper engagement means that where the Christian faith is most effective in inviting members of different cultural worlds to participate in the life of Jesus Christ will be where it has learned to live with those different cultural worlds in genuine, "otherness" and "commonness" relationships. To that end, I am deliberately positing a version of faithfulness that is different from an unquestioning allegiance to theological tradition that does not take seriously the claims of different cultural worlds.

6.3.5 "Otherness" in anthropology and sphere sovereignty

Faithfulness to justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility demands an honest look at one's own cultural world, one's own theological approach. Theologian and anthropologist Louise Lawrence contends that cultural anthropology is able to do this in the area of biblical studies.[834] If each discipline – theology and anthropology - is given the opportunity to become a lens through which to view

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engagement, and the cultural influences an individual brings to encounters with persons of different cultural communities, is intrinsic to an understand of the self as a lost sinner.

[833] Any development of Kuyper's ideas takes place within this context because Kuyper himself placed his theology squarely in the Calvinist frame. However, Mouw explains that other Christian traditions and Christians from different cultural groups can be involved in updating Kuyper's ideas. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 78-79.

[834] Lawrence writes, "It is my contention that anthropological approaches offer biblical exegetes some ways to unite practice and belief, body and soul, experience and institution, culture and gospel." Lawrence, *Reading with Anthropology*, 18. Drawing on Lawrence's contention, this thesis is built on the premise that cultural anthropology is able to offer new perspectives on theological cultural engagement.

the other this can result in a deeper understanding of one's own discipline and richer approaches to social and cultural situations.[835] However, Robbins and Rollason are more concerned with the specificity of "the other" in cultural accounts; allowing the predictions of the futures of individuals to fall outside the traditions of their cultural past.[836] This "otherness" fosters an attitude of justice because it denies the imposition of a version of reality. It fosters an attitude of mercy because it refrains from binding individuals inescapably to a notion of a "culture." It fosters an attitude of hospitality as the anthropologist makes room for the specific accounts of individuals in their cultural analysis. It fosters an attitude of humility as the anthropologist becomes self-aware and leaves behind inherited notions of Western development. It should be possible to uncover this kind of "otherness" in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty because the essence of sphere sovereignty is the upholding of the freedom of "the other" in their specific calling, and this pertains to individuals as well as to spheres.[837] When he speaks about the role of the state in upholding "the free movement of life in and for every sphere," Kuyper is referring to the individual members of those spheres.[838]

Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, then, upholds liberty of individual conscience. It upholds the right of each individual to maintain their specificity equally and in freedom, without coercion or manipulation. In doing so it fosters a sense of justice and mercy.[839] It not only allows "the other" to flourish in their own right, it also defends that right and in doing so fosters attitudes of hospitality and humility.[840] Applying sphere sovereignty in this way, with a deliberate rejection of

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[835] Notwithstanding some of the difficulties in the relationship between anthropology and theology, Lawrence helpfully explains that anthropology does not deny the doctrines of theology but enables different perspectives on them because of anthropology's own priorities. Lawrence, *Reading with Anthropology*, 20.

[836] Interpretation of cultural practices based on the past is not inevitable. Rollason, "Pacific Futures," 7-8.

[837] In the final chapter of his book *Rooted and Grounded*, Kuyper states, by way of metaphor, "Each person's calling is not merely to be a human being but to have one's own character." Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 32.

[838] Spheres need to be regulated by the State but that is for the following reason: "Since personal life can be suppressed by the group in which one lives, the state must protect the individual from the tyranny of his own circle... Not to suppress life nor to shackle freedom but to make possible the free movement of life in and for every sphere. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

[839] Using the example of the state, Kuyper explains that it exercises authority "alongside many other authorities that are equally absolute and sacred in the natural and spiritual world, in society and family." This equality, derived from divine sovereignty, is the setting for Kuyperian "otherness". Kuyper, *Our Program*, 21.

[840] Even with regard to individual citizens who practice other religions, Kuyper argues for equal rights. No-one should be discriminated against because of their religious allegiance, whether they are diverse expressions of the Christian faith, or alien to the Christian faith. This

the emphasis upon separation and an embrace of unity and interdependence, this Kuyperian "otherness" compliments an anthropological "otherness" and provides a platform for engaging theologically with the practices and works of individuals who inhabit diverse, complex, multiple cultural contexts.

6.3.6 From "otherness" to "commonness"

"Otherness" should lead to a contextual approach in cultural engagement. Where there is this sense of otherness there will also be the reality of shared experiences; a "commonness" between members of cultural worlds that comes from a sense of common humanity.[841] Where there is a feeling of "common ground" between members of various of cultural communities, there can be true relationship and a meaningful theological encounter.[842] Meaningful encounters between members of different cultural communities are especially important, given that no-one is ever a member of just one cultural community. However, Kuyperian and anthropological "otherness" must guard against any notion that one view of "the common good" is better than another. In those encounters between members of different cultural communities it is vital that Mouw's "spirit of genuine learning" may lead to a meaningful and respectful engagement.[843]

Common ground, which may also be called the public square, is the place where different cultural communities learn to speak and listen to each other with justice, humility, mercy, and hospitality. Pursuing the common good enables "the other" to share the table with us. A sense of "otherness" asks what kind of table "the other" imagines sharing. For this purpose, theologians also need to gather data about other ways to live and reflect critically on how they are distinct from their own perceptions.[844] This gathering of data, and the self-awareness that

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freedom is founded upon freedom of conscience which Kuyper insisted should "never be violated." Kuyper, *Our Program*, 69.

[841] This is Schilder's *sinousia* as explained in Chapter One: a common humanity whose commonness is rooted in creation and in the image of God. See e.g. Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, 7. However, as explained above, Kuyper and Bavinck also espoused a commonness among humankind which encompasses all aspects of human life.

[842] For example, Mouw cites the apostle Paul's encounter with Athenians in Acts Chapter 17 as an example of how an appeal to commonness can help facilitate theological encounters. Mouw, *Adventures*, 194.

[843] This facilitates genuine dialogue on an equal footing. Mouw, *Adventures*, 186.

[844] This refers back to Robbins' distinction between anthropologists and theologians in that anthropologists collect data about how "the other" lives whereas theologians focus on how "the other" might live differently. Robbins calls this "the critical force of theology" that mocks anthropology by its confidence that an awareness of a different way to live can lead to transformation. Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 288.

accompanies it, will contribute to a sense of "otherness" in order that "the other" might flourish to their fullest under God's sovereignty. On common ground the Christian faith is inevitably contextualised as faith-members realise their membership of multiple cultural worlds. On common ground the characteristics of humility, hospitality, justice, and mercy can flourish through civil speech and righteous acts.[845] Any attempt to renew Christian cultural engagement must include a commitment to finding common ground amongst all kinds of cultural worlds.

6.3.7 Forming the characteristics for multiplex theological cultural engagement

Combining "otherness" and "commonness" can still result in a theological encounter with different cultural worlds that leaves little room for true equality and reciprocation.[846] As has been argued throughout this thesis, human beings inhabit multiple cultural worlds, and are constantly influenced by multiple cultural relationships and phenomena. One human being does not simply live as a member of one cultural community alongside members of other cultural communities; acknowledging this truism should lead to an acceptance that cultural worlds (and their members) which we currently do not inhabit are also complex entities, as meaningful and indefinable as our own. This is one argument against the assimilation of minority cultural groups into a wider society; assimilation is based on a delusion that there is one wider cultural group to be assimilated into.[847] However, it also acts as a check on the idea of integration and one-way hospitality. Living with other cultural worlds requires more than a sense of otherness and commonness: these can still fuel attitudes of patriarchy. Living with others in a meaningful way demands that we take off

[845] Hospitality in this context may be practical but it stems from a deeper conviction based on commonness: spiritual hospitality is about "creating space" physically and metaphorically for others. See e.g., Mouw, *Uncommon Decency*, 74-75.

[846] Kaemingk touches on this in his description of how Christians follow Christ in their relationships with Muslim immigrants: to follow Christ means to seek not just the good of those who belong to different belief-systems in terms of relief, aid, education and so on. It means seeking the restoration of their human dignity and their ability to be cultivators of creation in their own way and in their own right. Christians who claim to follow Christ should pursue this in their encounters with Muslim immigrants regardless of whether or not such encounters result in Christian conversions. Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 179.

[847] Following his exposition of Kuyper's pursuit of multiformity, Kaemingk explains how Christian pluralists can legitimately challenge the liberal secularist attempt to assimilate minority faith groups into a "neutral" society. He concludes this four-point argument with: "Christian pluralists must expose liberalism's attempts at Muslim assimilation as hopelessly backward. Dreams of liberal uniformity must be exposed as fundamentally incapable of responding justly to a religiously diverse and dynamic world." Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 117.

our shoes of assumption and step reverently into other cultural worlds to discover better ways of living together.[848] This involves the risk of change to our own cultural boundaries, perhaps even to our theological boundaries. We do not lay aside our membership of other cultural worlds, and we do not lay aside the things of those cultural worlds that make them meaningful. Rather, we embark in a mutual participation and invitation, both giving and *receiving* hospitality, justice, humility, and mercy. This is genuine relationship, and it demonstrates faithfulness to the four characteristics mentioned above.

6.3.8 Christ, the restorer of all things

A further dimension to this area is the idea that the pursuit of a contextual, faithful, and multiplex approach gives rise to an invitation to all cultural worlds to participate in the kingdom of God. Alongside his commitment to Christ's lordship over all creation, Bavinck also upholds the different nature of the kingdom of God in the sense that it is not of this world.[849] He argues that the Christian gospel is not a philosophy to resolve social problems, neither is Christ a political leader nor the Church a political authority.[850] Instead, the Christian gospel is far greater than this: as Saviour, Christ is able to restore all things - including nature by grace - and therefore nothing is rejected because everything created by God is restored.[851] In fact, not only does Christ recreate "all natural ordinances" by "the new spirit" but Bavinck states that "every creature of God is good, and

[848] During the 2018 European Neo-Calvinist conference, scholar Alex Massad, a student at Fuller Theological Seminary, challenged both Mouw and Kaemingk in their application of "common good" to Muslims. His argument was that neither had adequately developed an understanding of what "common good" means to a Muslim and therefore neither required stepping into the Muslim's world to influence their ideas of "common good" and of pluralism. Massad argued that despite the pursuit of cultural pluralism and the common good for Muslims, these pursuits were still being carried out from the perspective of non-Muslims.

[849] Bavinck begins his argument by describing the attitudes of those who believe that grace and nature, and creation and recreation are in opposition to each other and therefore advocate withdrawal from the world's activities. Instead, as mentioned before, grace restores nature but even so, Christ's kingdom is not of the world of men. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 78.

[850] Christ is Saviour first and foremost. Yet because he is Saviour, he is able to restore nature by grace. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 79-80.

[851] Bavinck writes that this does not include the "works of the devil" which have corrupted creation. This is a similar idea to those cultural activities which stem from an orientation away from God's original intention for creation. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 81.

nothing is to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified, by the Word of God and prayer."[852]

6.3.9 Confession, "otherness", and contextualisation

If Christ recreates in this way, then pursuing "otherness" in theological cultural engagement, whereby that engagement allows for transformation and restoration, becomes a confession of Christ's work. Bavinck explains that the Christian's response to Christ is to confess him in all areas of life, and towards all peoples.[853] It is in the confession of Christ's work in all areas of life that we are formed into "otherness". This confession is of a gospel belonging to the Christ who stooped down from heaven to step inside the skin of "the other".[854] In confessing Christ, we confess how he manifested "otherness" and how he contextualised the knowledge of God in his incarnation. Theologically, Christ is the source of both "otherness" and contextualisation: in him alone lies the power for transformation, restoration, and cultural diversity in creational and re-creational unity.[855] Furthermore, it is Christ's taking on of the "other" in his incarnation that makes this approach to cultural engagement distinctly Christian. It is not merely an exercise in understanding oneself better which is a selfish act, but a true prioritising of the complex, cultural "other".

In this second area I have argued that theological cultural engagement should be both contextual and faithful. Contextualisation is necessary and inevitable because of the complex nature of cultural realities. Faithfulness is made manifest in the characteristics of humility, justice, mercy, and hospitality; in pursuing and being formed in a sense of "otherness" that is built on Jesus Christ. This is what makes the "theology" part of cultural engagement meaningful: in that sense it is the irreducible core. It is because this kind of

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[852] Christ has restored all things; Christians appropriate them biblically and prayerfully. Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 83.

[853] Bavinck writes: "He who believes, confesses. His life itself becomes a confession, a living, holy, God-pleasing sacrifice in Christ Jesus." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 58.

[854] Kuyper refers to the gospel in the same way in his speech concerning poverty, as that which proclaims Christ as "a Redeemer who, although he was rich, became poor for your sake so he might make you rich." He assumed the implication of this was that Christ's followers should do the same for those in need. Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 68.

[855] Kuyper draws the distinction between uniformity that stems from "the sameness of a model" and the "oneness of a body in which every member retains its own place." This body refers to Christ and God's kingdom in which "diversity is not lost but all the more sharply defined." Kuyper, "Uniformity," 35.

theological cultural engagement is distinctly Christian that it can build genuine relationships with “the other”, celebrate cultural pluralism, and embrace the multiplex nature of all cultural worlds.

6.4 Creation: Cultivation and Harvest

So far, this renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement has involved two dynamic theological ideas which have developed from the dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism. These ideas concern cultural worlds being meaningful and indefinable, and multiplex engagement being both contextual and faithful. Human cultural activity in relation to creation is the subject of the third idea in which I will explore the cultivation and harvest of creation**.** While the other two ideas have been held somewhat in tension – meaningful with indefinable and contextual with faithful – this part of the approach seeks to show the continuity between the cultural work of humanity as set in motion at creation,[856] and the harvest of cultural development at the return of Christ.[857]

6.4.1 Cultivation of “creation”

I am using the word “creation” theologically in this context as a noun to indicate all that has been created by God in the biblical sense; in other words, *the* creation.[858] By “created by God” I mean an understanding of creation as having been made in and through and for Jesus Christ.[859] Although the word “creation” is theologically loaded it is appropriate to use it here because I am developing a theological approach from within a theological tradition. I am referring to the totality of creation but making the distinction between humanity and the natural

[856] Mouw draws attention to the fact that for Kuyper human cultural development was an influencing factor in God’s act of creation, hence why the “cultural mandate” to fill the earth appears in the creation account. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 6-7.

[857] Kuyper refers to this as “the abiding profit” of all cultural works carried out by virtue of common grace which constitutes the honour and glory of the nations to be gathered together at the end of the ages. This honour and glory will be “carried into this new Jerusalem.” Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 549.

[858] I am making a distinction here between all that has been created and the act of creation in which God continues to uphold all he has created through his providence. However, it is a distinction for the sake of clarity, not a separation of ideas. Wolters argues that all that has been made, and the act of creating it, and the providence of God in sustaining it are inseparable. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 14.

[859] This is based on the Reformed doctrine of creation which assumes that the act of creation was the initiative of the triune God. See e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 101.

world. This is where anthropology is helpful: human cultural development and human behaviour are intrinsic elements of creation. At the same time, the way humans relate to the natural world, ecology, and other parts of the cosmos has implications for creation as a whole. This is why the idea of cultivation is key.

What do I mean by cultivation? Theologically-speaking I am referring to the work carried out by human beings as a direct result of the cultural mandate given to the first humans in Genesis 1 and 2.[860] In the context of this thesis, I understand this mandate to be 1) a command for all humanity in all times and in all places regardless of their individual orientation towards or away from God, and 2) a command which has neither been rescinded nor replaced.[861] All humanity has been given the responsibility to cultivate the earth in all kinds of ways, producing cultural works so that creation may evolve and develop according to God's original purpose for it.[862] I understand this to include the totality of creation, including the natural world.[863] With the caveat that much has been done as a result of the Fall to destroy God's intentions for creation, the original intention for human beings to steward creation, not ignore, despise, or dispose of creation remains. As Wolters explains, both regenerate and unregenerate persons are involved in reorienting creation towards God's original intention.[864] This is cultivation. It is our cultural responsibility as human beings.

6.4.2 A positive view of creation

This idea springs specifically from question three of the dialogue in chapter 4, which concerns having a positive view of creation. A positive view of creation

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[860] Mouw describes the cultural mandate as "an expression of God's own investment in cultural formation." Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 41. In attributing the belief that the cultural mandate is crucial for human development to Kuyper and other Reformed thinkers, Mouw explains that God always intended for humans to fill the earth with "the processes and products of human culture." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 7.

[861] Kuyper explains that this mandate was repeated to Noah after the flood and even when humanity tried to rebel against it at the Tower of Babel, God confused their speech in order that they would continue to scatter across the earth to fulfil the mandate. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 360-361, 364.

[862] As mentioned in Chapter Two, Wolters explains that the cultural mandate has never been overturned despite sin. See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 42, 45.

[863] As an aside, Chaplin remarks in parentheses that an increasing number of members of society who care about ecology ("green citizens") are Christians and that their faith is the reason for being "green." Chaplin, "Civic Pluralism," no pages.

[864] This is because of God's common grace – his "goodness" – to all his creatures despite the reality of sin. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 61.

means that theology recognizes, accepts, and engages with God's eternal purposes for creation, which is vital for a meaningful cultural engagement. It means that theological cultural engagement now has an eye towards the "new and more glorious forms" of creation to come.[865] It means theology develops the hallmarks of hospitality, mercy, humility, and justice outlined in the previous area of the approach in the following ways. Hospitality may show itself in generosity towards others who undertake different kinds of cultural works because they are members of different cultural worlds to our own, and in providing safe places for cultural communities to share their works with each other.[866] Mercy may show itself in two ways: firstly, in maintaining generosity when others' cultural values conflict with our own, and secondly, in finding ways to heal the ways in which humanity's cultural works have damaged the earth.[867] Humility may show itself through being practically aware of the antithesis that runs through every human being, whether regenerate or not, and in seeking reparation and forgiveness where cultural works have caused desolation to indigenous communities.[868] Finally, justice may show itself in speaking out against cultural works and values which are not in accord with God's original purposes, and which oppress the vulnerable, the weak and the helpless.[869] These four characteristics clearly overlap, and while they do not exclusively

[865] Kuyper insists that only the form of this present creation will perish but the essence will remain. It will be "a similar, much more glorious world." Kuyper believes in the continuity between this creation and the new creation. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1*, 572.

[866] Kaemingk suggests that one way in which American evangelicals might show solidarity with their Muslim neighbours, and members of other faith groups, is to become occasionally cobelligerent with them, particularly on issues of freedom to practice their faith. Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 292-293. This is an example of different cultural communities sharing their cultural works with each other for the common good, in an attitude of hospitality.

[867] In describing encounters with people of other faiths, Mouw explains that empathy is a vital quality and a willingness to learn from others. This is because truth is not confined to Christianity. Mouw, *Evangelical Civility*, 186-187.

[868] For example, an increasing number of Protestant and evangelical denominations are repenting of their tradition's complicity in the consequences of the papal Doctrine of Discovery of 1452, and other edicts. This repentance is leading to the publishing of official statements and commitments, for example by the World Council of Churches, to promote the welfare of indigenous communities, including the development of indigenous theologies. World Council of Churches, "Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on indigenous peoples," WCC Executive Committee, published February 17, 2012, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/2012-02/statement-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-its-enduring-impact-on-indigenous-peoples.

[869] Storkey lists many Christian groups which exhibit justice by working with vulnerable women and advocating for them in their communities and nations. Storkey, *Scars*, 221-222.

demand a positive view of creation itself, *having* a positive view of creation gives these four characteristics greater meaning and purpose.[870]

6.4.3 Cultural works and common grace

If Christ is involved in the act of creation (and re-creation), then creation must be of great worth, and that means that it is worthy of cultivation.[871] Therefore, works of cultivation which are in accordance with God's original intention for creation cannot be meaningless, regardless of who carries out those cultural works. No cultural work, whether by regenerate or unregenerate, is possible without common grace, and Kuyper is clear that the significance of this "fruit" of common grace lasts forever.[872] Therefore, a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement must take all cultural works seriously because the cultivation of creation will be eternal. Meaningful theological cultural analysis can have no room for any notion of the total destruction of this world; instead it must affirm the worth of cultural works which allow creation to develop still further.[873] Cultural development that leads to cultural renewal encompasses the cultural works of all peoples everywhere on an equal footing, at the same time affirming diversity and commonness, and rejecting separation and imperialism on theological grounds.

A positive view of human cultural works, and a positive view of creation, presupposes a commitment to the idea of common grace. According to Kuyper it is common grace that has allowed the earth to be cultivated and transformed.[874] Common grace has three functions with regard to cultural

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[870] A further example is drawn from Kuyper's indignance over the forced labour in Java, a Dutch colony. He is clear that exploitation of native workers on coffee farms for the financial benefit of The Netherlands has caused great evils, not least in restricting "indigenous developments in the colonies." See e.g., Kuyper, *Our Program*, 303-305.

[871] In his explanation of the continuity between this creation and the new creation, Kuyper explains that the "kingdom of glory" which is to come will have an external form that is worthy of Christ's eternal physical form. Furthermore, because there is continuity between the essence of both creations what has been achieved in terms of cultural development in this age will continue into the next. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol.1,* 573-574.

[872] Restoration of God's original creation and its recreation in Christ is the point of common grace. It does not exist for this creation alone but is an intrinsic part of God's creation purposes for eternity. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 578.

[873] Again, Kuyper reinforces the idea that it is not creation that will pass away but the "present form of the world." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 583.

[874] See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 584. Kuyper's enthusiasm for the way in which the earth has been enriched because of common grace needs to be placed in its historical context. Contemporary ecological issues do not negate his attribution of cultivation to common grace, but they highlight the existence of human greed, resulting from sin.

works: general human cultural development, the development of God's people, and the trajectory of cultural works in the renewal of creation.[875] Theological cultural analysis that presupposes a common grace that achieves these three functions will engage positively with diverse cultural works. Theological cultural analysis of this ilk will keep in mind the continuity of works of cultivation by regenerate and unregenerate alike in the renewed creation. There is no assumed hierarchy or superiority in this kind of theological cultural engagement. To return to the four characteristics outlined above, a theological cultural analysis that engages positively with cultural works will have no room for colonization; instead it will serve the overall purposes of God in human cultural development. This kind of theological cultural engagement will seek a cultivation of creation which reflects the one through whom creation exists. This is true cultivation of creation, true Christianity, true theological cultural engagement.

While this description of cultivation is more theologically weighted than anthropologically, it has been heavily informed by the dialogue with cultural anthropology. Influences such as "the other", indefinability, self-awareness, and multiple perspectives, have come from this thesis and from other previous collaborations between theology and anthropology.[876] Cultivation demands hospitality, humility, justice, and mercy; it is not divided from the contextualization of the Christian faith, nor is it in opposition to faithfulness to the Reformed tradition. Cultivation is both an anthropological concern and a theological concern, in that it involves the relationship between humans and humans, humans and creation, and humans, creation, and the Creator. This shared content with its shared vocabulary provides a wider lens for understanding what it means for human beings to build cultural worlds, produce cultural works, and develop cultural relationships.

6.4.4 Formation and cultivation

A wider lens is helpful in an approach to Christian cultural engagement that includes the cultivation of creation. Yet to be effective, cultural engagement

[875] These are "three kinds of fruit for the kingdom of glory." Kuyper, *Common Grace, Vol. 1*, 587.

[876] As described in the introduction, Lawrence lays out the arguments for cooperation between anthropology and the Christian faith as expounded by missionary and anthropologist Charles Kraft. Lawrence, *Reading with Anthropology*, 21-24.

requires the formation of attitudes which lead to a true Christian cultivation.[877] Here is where works such as Strange's *Unplugged* and Turnau's *Popologetics* have merit. [878] Notwithstanding the difficulties this thesis has with Strange's concept of "culture" (as described in Chapter One), in the sphere of formation, a book that equips Christians to "process…cultural stories" has an important role to play. However, taking a neo-Calvinist approach to this formation of a true Christian cultivation in keeping with this thesis, Christ's relationship with creation provides an appropriate starting point. Bavinck provides a beautiful description of this in *The Sacrifice of Praise*:

> [Christ] also loves nature with a child-like joy. He enjoys her beauty and refreshes Himself in her glory. He has an open eye for the grass of the earth and the lilies of the field, for the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. Vine and fig tree, the mustard seed and the grain of wheat, grape and thorn, fig and thistle, acre and flock, fishing and commerce, are used by Him as symbols and parables in His instruction concerning things Heavenly. *The whole of nature speaks unto Him of the Father*, Which is in Heaven and Who maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. And so very little does He disapprove of all luxury, that He, when Mary once anointed Him with a very choice ointment, does not complain with His disciples of the waste but accepts readily and with gratitude, this very precious mark of honour."[879]

Implicit in this description of Christ's relationship to creation is the expectation that those who call themselves his followers should imitate him. This is the basis for the formation of attitudes and actions towards the fabric of creation and its cultivation as well as created beings and their cultural worlds, and is intrinsic to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement that seeks to approach the complex, cultural "other".

6.4.5 Formation and re-orientation

However, Christ's relationship to creation and its cultivation has a further horizon: "The corporeal resurrection of Christ from the dead is the decisive

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[877] The development of the character of a Christian, and their subsequent cultural works, is one of the fruits of common grace mentioned by Kuyper. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 587.

[878] Strange, *Unplugged*, 17.

[879] This paragraph is inclusive: Christ's positive relationship with creation extends to the fabric of creation and all created things, including all created human beings: "the evil and the good." Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 81-82 (italics mine).

proof that Christianity does not stand in enmity to anything human or natural but that it only desires to deliver the creation of all things sinful and perfectly sanctify it unto God."[880] This statement from Bavinck that Christianity (even Christ) is not opposed to "anything human or natural" but is intent on redeeming creation and reorienting all things towards God's original purposes is key to this thesis. It encompasses the whole of the work of Christ on behalf of all of creation and the cultural works emanating from creation; past, present *and* future.[881] Theological cultural engagement must take its cue from this in defining its relationship to the cultivation of creation, and the end goal for humanity's cultural development throughout history.

6.4.6 Harvest of creation

As stated above, cultivation of creation – and the production of cultural works both now and in the future – concerns both theology and anthropology. Anthropologically, the future of cultural development will look like multitudes of cultural worlds either live alongside each other or perpetually clash.[882] Theology in the Reformed tradition promises a far more positive view of the future of all cultural worlds and works. As described in Chapter Two, the culmination of all the cultural endeavours of humanity throughout history is a great harvest: a multiplicity of languages, races, and their cultural works will be gathered together in great abundance at the return of Christ and the renewal of all created things.[883] There will be cultural pluralism in the age to come but this cultural pluralism will have the unifying nature of Christ. Theologically, this is the future of cultural development.

However, Bavinck's previous statement about the implication of Christ's resurrection also means that the harvest of cultural works is not

[880] Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 82.

[881] Strange has this metanarrative in view in the sense that Christians are called to engage with "culture" according to God's purposes, which is only possible because of Christ's work. See e.g., Strange, *Unplugged*, 52-54.

[882] There is no single, anthropological prediction of the cultural future but generally they may be a form of glocalization, "in which global processes cannot help but take locally specific shapes." Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 385-387. This could also involve a high level of conflict between older and more modern civilisations, which can only be heightened with the emergence of multiple local "cultures."

[883] Sanctified and redeemed cultural works will be gathered into God's kingdom and creation will be renewed and reborn. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, *Vol. 4*, 720.

indiscriminate.[884] While Christ is not an enemy of anything in creation, because sin exists this harvest must involve winnowing: this winnowing will separate those works which have been carried out according to God's original intentions for creation from the works which have been oriented away from those intentions.[885] Such a theological idea creates contention in the Reformed tradition due to the belief that only regenerate human beings are able to carry out cultural works which please God.[886] In this argument, the harvest of cultural works are inseparable from the harvest of souls, with the regenerate and their cultural works departing to everlasting life, and the unregenerate and their cultural works departing to everlasting destruction.[887] I acknowledge that this contention exists, but as a result of the research undertaking in this thesis I argue that it is possible to make a distinction between the future harvest of souls, and the future harvest of cultural works, even though both will require a winnowing.[888]

6.4.7 No once-for-all categories for cultural works

My argument for distinguishing between a harvest of souls and a harvest of cultural works proceeds from the dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism. It can also be clearly understood from the renewed approach to theological engagement developed out in this chapter. For example, the first area of this approach holds that all cultural worlds have meaning in and of

[884] When Kuyper describes the passing away of the "present form of this world" he is speaking about the works of unrighteousness in it. He writes: "gone are all plagues that tormented, all insects that destroyed, all germs that bred disease." By extension, those cultural works which have hindered creation's development will be winnowed out. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 586.

[885] For example, Mouw describes this well in his distinction between the diversity of cultural worlds and the plurality of religions. While the former is God's purposes for his creation, the latter is not. Mouw, "Herman Bavinck Lecture."

[886] As explained in Chapter One, Calvin's view of the good works carried out by unregenerate persons is complex and relies in part on how theologians interpret his understanding of "grace." However, he clearly states that because of the continued corruption of sin in unbelievers, no virtue can be held to be of any value. See e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 180.

[887] According to Calvin, because the unregenerate person's soul and will are bound to only produce sinful works, everything they do is oriented towards evil, and therefore "damnable." See e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 181.

[888] Part of this winnowing will involve injustices carried out throughout history as part of human cultural development. Believers are implicated in these injustices alongside unbelievers and will be called to account. See e.g., Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 59-60. This gives weight to the distinction between a winnowing of souls and a winnowing of cultural works.

themselves which theologically-speaking is theirs by the will of God.[889] Yet because all cultural worlds exist in relation and inter-relation with each other, it is not possible to once-and-for-all define "culture."[890] If it is not possible to once-and-for-all define "culture" then it is not possible to apply once-and-for-all theological categories to cultural works.[891] This is in part an anthropological view of the situation: just as "otherness" opens up the possibility of new unimagined futures for individuals, it also open up the possibility of different outcomes for cultural works. Here is where theology also comes into play: if "culture" is ultimately indefinable then it opens up the possibility for transformation in the sense that what may be considered out of kilter with God's original purposes in one instance may be reoriented back towards those purposes through the work of Christ.[892]

Does this reorientation depend upon the state of the souls of the persons carrying out those cultural works? I suggest that there are two answers to this question: no and yes. The primary answer is negative: reorientation or redemption of creation, and all proceeding cultural works depends solely on the work of Christ, and not on the persons doing cultural works.[893] To say otherwise is to lessen the power and significance of the purposes of God throughout eternity. In addition, all cultural works, whether carried out by believers or unbelievers, are only possible through God's faithfulness and grace to his creation.[894] Therefore, human beings are only cultural producers because of God's initiative, and they can only reorient their cultural works towards his

[889] This corresponds to Kuyper's idea that all spheres (regardless of the state of the souls of their members) are sovereign in their own right, and this sovereignty is delegated directly from God's sovereignty.

[890] This corresponds to the anthropological view that "cultures do not stand still for their portraits." Clifford, "Introduction," 10.

[891] In some respects, Strange's approach to cultural engagement for Christians implies that cultural works can change their orientation. As explained in Chapter One, Strange calls this "subversive fulfilment" whereby Christians "connect" culturally and then "confront" the idolatrous narrative attached to a cultural artefact or cultural reality. The point of cultural connection and confrontation is to redeem "culture." By implication this is a reorientation of cultural works to God's original purposes. See e.g., Strange, *Unplugged*, 102-103.

[892] Christ's redemptive work is cosmic in scope and penetrates creation to the same extent as sin. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 86.

[893] Because Christ is both Creator and Redeemer, he alone is able to restore nature by grace: "in re-creating he revealed the riches of grace in that nature." Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 271.

[894] See e.g., Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 60.

purposes because of Christ's work. Reorientation depends upon Christ, not upon people.

However, because cultural works are carried out by human beings, the second answer is positive. Through Christ's work, human beings influence the orientation of cultural works.[895] This is precisely why neo-Calvinism advocates Christians working in every sphere of society, both for influence and for invitation; influencing the realm of common grace with the light of special grace, at the same time as inviting members of all spheres and cultural worlds to participate in the life of Christ.[896] Because of these two answers it is possible to affirm two things at the same time: that regenerate human beings reorient cultural works according to God's original intentions, *and* that because of God's common grace and the influence of Christians, unregenerate human beings are also able to reorient their cultural works according to God's original purposes. Making a distinction between the source of the redemption of creation and cultural works – Christ - and the human agents of cultural works further enables a distinction between the harvest of souls and the harvest of cultural works. Kuyper makes this distinction himself: common grace may impede sin, but it cannot eradicate it; special grace alone is saving grace.[897] Cultural works, however, will endure, not in their present form but in "the hidden life germ, the foundational significance of things; and on the new earth something akin will need to emerge from that germ, but something of a higher order and with richer glory."[898] This distinction between the harvest of souls and the harvest of cultural works already exists in Kuyperian Calvinism.

[895] This is true of all human beings, regenerate and unregenerate, who by their cultural works produce "the fruit of the honor and the glory of the nations." The difference is that only the regenerate will enjoy them in the age to come. Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 550.

[896] This may be the point at which two of Kuyper's territories (see Chapter One) overlap; where the first territory of common grace without the influence of special grace evolves into the fourth territory, whereby the light of Christ shines out from the institutional church into wider society, carrying with it an invitation to share in that light. See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 194.

[897] In fact, common grace will have been corrupted by the time of the final judgement and put to use for the glorification of humanity in opposition to the glory of God. Common grace cannot lead humanity to the highest form of life; only special grace and the redemption of Jesus Christ can do that. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 540-542.

[898] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 544.

6.4.8 Forming attitudes to creation's cultivation and harvest

A faithful reading of Kuyper suggests that the harvest of cultural works is the culmination of human cultural development purposed by God since creation.[899] Such a harvest not only provides a vision of the future but provides greater impetus for theological cultural engagement from now until harvest time. This impetus is motivated by the four characteristics of the second area of a renewed approach – justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility – and directed towards not only human members of all cultural worlds but also the natural world. In Chapter Two I referenced the book *Creation in Crisis* in which ethicist Jonathan Moo cited Wolters' stress on the continuity between the present and renewed creation; earlier in the same book, New Testament scholar Douglas Moo provides motivation for stewarding the present creation in ways which are in keeping with the four characteristics outlined above.[900] While not a neo-Calvinist, Moo's insights shed light onto a neglected area within the theological tradition. He cites the two biblical commands to love God and to love others as the basis for how we relate to creation and which serve to redirect "our stewardship of creation from the self-serving turn that it took as a result of the Fall."[901]

With echoes of both neo-Calvinist theology and anthropology, Moo explains that Christians need love for God and others, as well as understanding of the natural world; this challenge can be met because through God's Spirit Christians are "progressively being renewed in their thinking".[902] Putting this in terms of this chapter's development, the four characteristics of justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility, which are either implicit or explicit throughout neo-Calvinism, and hoped-for by anthropology, should enable believers to pursue excellence in ecological practice, in personal, community, national, and global life. Such a

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[899] The "final goal" of God is the development of the world to "its consummation." Kuyper, "Common Grace," 176.

[900] Douglas Moo is currently the Blanchard Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, Illinois.

[901] Moo's chapter is set within the context of New Testament Pauline theology. He argues from this context that the gospel places a demand upon Christians for "ecological responsibility." Douglas J. Moo, "Creation and new creation: transforming Christian perspectives," in *Creation in Crisis*, ed. Robert S. White (London: SPCK, 2009), 241, 252, 254.

[902] Moo argues for the phrase "new creation" in Pauline theology meaning the full renewal of created things through Christ's work both now and in the final renewal. There is an implication here that as new creations themselves, caught up in this renewal, Christians have a double responsibility to the creation. Moo, "Creation," 251, 254.

pursuit contributes to the harvest of cultural works and provides a credible platform for invitation to participate in the cosmic redemption of Christ. In commenting about the depths of the human condition, shared by all, Mouw writes that "we eventually come to a grace beyond which there are no further depths."[903] This redemption of Christ underpins every aspect of cultural renewal for every individual.

This third area of this renewed approach has focussed on creation: cultivation and harvest. Cultivation, in the sense of human beings producing cultural works, is integral to God's original purposes for creation. This is the foundation for a positive view of creation. Cultivation is only possible because of God's common grace to all people. Cultivation can be either in keeping with those purposes or out of kilter with them, because the Fall has corrupted every aspect of cultural development.[904] However, through Christ's work all cultural works can be reoriented towards God's purposes, and all things in creation can be renewed and restored.[905] Believers should be involved in all aspects of cultural life both to influence this renewal and to invite members of different cultural worlds to participate in this renewal. Here is where different cultural futures can be imagined, combining anthropological and theological ideas to form a sense of "otherness".

6.4.9 Cultivation and harvest: the heart of cultural engagement

In this section I have suggested that there is a future harvest of cultural works, which is distinct but not entirely separate from the future harvest of souls. Because of this, the possibility of reorientation, restoration, and reformation, and the inevitability of the renewal of all things gives further meaning to the first two areas developed in this chapter. Firstly, the fact that cultural works (and the humans who carry them out) can be redeemed at any time deepens the meaningfulness of cultural worlds and further affirms the impossibility of absolutely defining them. Secondly, the fact that "otherness" is possible

[903] Mouw, *Adventures*, 141.

[904] In our choices as to what cultural artefacts to engage with, or how to cultivate creation, sin affects our ability to discern what God terms good and evil. Cultural development is therefore marred because of this reality. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 240, 242.

[905] Again, here is where Strange's contribution to cultural analysis plays its part. He writes, "We have been renewed, restored and retasked to take up the God-glorifying culture-building that we were created for." Strange, *Unplugged*, 56.

because of the future harvest of cultural works gives validation to the contextual approach of theological engagement while creating a sense of urgency in developing faithfulness to humility, hospitality, justice, and mercy. These ideas also give greater impetus to formation. Reorienting cultural works to God's original purposes in preparation of a final harvest demands a formation of character and mindset which are steeped in love of God and love of others, in a humble willingness to learn and change, in attitudes of justice and mercy, and in hospitality to the cultural works of others. Cultivation and harvest, then, may be seen as the culmination of the first two parts of this renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement. They also provide the validation of both cultural complexity and human commonness: many-ness in the kingdom of God is an eschatological gift but a final, redemptive act of cultural renewal will result in the longed-for unity and commonness that overcomes all separation.[906]

6.5 Conclusion: Renewal in Practice

My intention in this chapter has been to put forward a more systematic and pragmatic approach to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. To do this I have drawn on integrated knowledge from a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. In Kuyperian terms I have concentrated on the relationship between two distinct spheres in order to better understand God's purposes for human cultural development.[907]

6.5.1 The shape of renewal

In the first section I described cultural worlds as meaningful in their own right at the same time as being ultimately indefinable. This understanding of cultural worlds and their interrelations leads to an acceptance that theological cultural engagement needs to be multiplex in nature, which formed the content for the second section. Theological and cultural contextualization reflects the

[906] Mouw writes that such a gift of diversity "must be properly nuanced if we are to avoid new forms of racism and ethnocentrism" but that does not negate the need for deep contextualization and the self-awareness of the constant, fluid contextualization of our theology and our cultural engagement. Mouw, *Adventures*, 139-140.

[907] For Kuyper, scholarship was a sphere in its own right that should not be dominated by either the church or the state. Scholarship should be reclaimed by Christians because it is "a God-given duty." Scholarship is designed to bring honour and glory to God. See e.g.,Bratt's citation of Kuyper's statement on scholarship from *De Gemeene Gratie in Wetenschap en Kunst in* Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper:A Centennial Reader*, 474.

complexity of cultural processes but, like the first area, engagement requires a tension; this time it is between contextualization and faithfulness to the theological tradition doing the engaging. In the third section I described both the present and future dimensions to the cultural works produced by members of cultural worlds: cultural works are a cultivation of creation now and will be harvested at the renewal of all things: This is the twofold purpose of cultural development and is at the heart of theological cultural engagement. Informed by anthropological and theological priorities, this is the shape of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

6.5.2 Renewal through formation

Described in the above way this approach is different to the approaches outlined in Chapter One, partly because it integrates knowledge from neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology. However, the formation of attitudes in the likeness of this integrated knowledge also transforms this approach into a distinctive, dynamic, and relational practice that upholds the complexity of the cultural "other". In this regard I have intentionally referred to an anthropological concern with "otherness", neo-Calvinism's concern with commonness, and Bavinck's elucidation of the relationship between grace and nature from *A Sacrifice of Praise*. I have demonstrated that the concerns of anthropology can be found in Kuyper's theology and the development of neo-Calvinism by other scholars. To this end, the collaboration between theology and anthropology in the Reformed tradition does not end in a comparative study between the two disciplines, despite the use of shared vocabulary. The point of the collaboration is to form the internal inclinations of Christians towards theological cultural engagement that harmonizes the above priorities within the neo-Calvinist movement.[908]

6.5.3 Approaching the complex, cultural "other"

Formation in attitudes where the complex, cultural "other" becomes a priority, and where characteristics of justice, mercy, humility and hospitality flourish, is

[908] Kuyper insisted that forming a specific "life-view" and identifying with a distinctively Christian sphere in the midst of competing worldviews was necessary for believers to be able to remain distinctively Christian in the world. To be faithful to the Kuyperian tradition this

vital to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement and to putting this approach to the complex, cultural "other" into practice. Cultural encounters and relationships become profound when there is an understanding of cultural worlds being both meaningful and indefinable. Members of diverse cultural worlds view themselves through different lenses when the Christian faith is truly contextual.[909] Relationships between members of cultural worlds exist on a deeper level when faithfulness to a theological tradition is worked out in justice, mercy, hospitality, and humility.[910] Finally, where there is a positive attitude towards creation, there is also respect and generosity towards the way members of diverse cultural worlds cultivate creation.[911] This positive view of creation is inextricably linked to the harvest of cultural works and the renewal of all things through the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ. These areas provide the content for formation in attitudes necessary for meaningful theological engagement in the Reformed tradition. Formation provides a self-reflective element to this approach which will allow it to bend and move with the inevitable fluctuations of cultural change. The formation of these attitudes towards creation, towards cultural development, and towards "the other" in different, complex cultural worlds through the integration of theology and anthropology is what makes this approach to Christian cultural engagement unique and distinct.

collaboration between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism must advance this specific life-view through formation. Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries," 400.

[909] Keller explains that entering a "culture" is vital to understanding the pastoral needs of the people within it. He writes: "If we are living in the culture and developing friendships with people, contextualization should be natural and organic." Keller, *Center Church*, 122. Although this thesis challenges the assumption that a "culture" can be understood fully in this way because of the anthropological concerns stated throughout, this approach to contextualisation leads to attitudes of mercy, justice, humility, and hospitality because it places an emphasis on empathy.

[910] This is evidenced in Kuyper's exhortation in his speech on *The Problem of Poverty* that Christians must practice "deeds of love" in order to imitate Christ's love and compassion. See e.g., Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 68.

[911] This is because the development of the world depends upon cultivation in all spheres of life by all human beings. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 549.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion: A Neo-Kuyperian Approach to Christian Cultural Engagement

7.1 Introduction: A Neo-Kuyperian Approach for Contemporary Challenges

Is it possible to develop a meaningful approach for theological cultural engagement within the Reformed tradition; an approach that takes seriously the complexities of cultural realities and leads to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement? To answer this question, I have developed an approach that brings together the Reformed theological movement neo-Calvinism and the academic discipline of cultural anthropology in dialogue. To achieve this, I have analysed, critiqued, and integrated the concerns of both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology regarding cultural analysis. In the pursuit of a renewed approach to the complex, cultural "other" I considered the following key points: 1) Cultural analysis requires an acknowledgment that "culture" is both meaningful and undefinable; 2) Because "culture" is complex and requires multiple perspectives, theological cultural engagement must be contextual in nature, while remaining faithful to the tradition; 3) Theological cultural engagement that is founded upon a positive view of creation gives cultural works and human cultural development meaning and a future purpose. Through consideration and integration of the priorities of both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology I developed the above three key points into three dynamic areas for Christian cultural engagement: 1. Cultural worlds: Meaningful and Indefinable; 2. Multiplexity: Contextual and Faithful; 3. Creation: Cultivation and Harvest. These terms reflect the desire to represent both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology, and to prioritise the complex, cultural "other" in Christian cultural engagement.

7.1.1 Putting the "neo" in neo-Kuyperian

In this conclusion I will return to my secondary research questions outlined in the Introduction to ascertain how far they have assisted in answering the primary research question of whether it is possible to renew Christian cultural engagement to reflect the cultural complexities of the "other". Through this recapitulation I will summarize the main points of the thesis, demonstrating the

knowledge gained from neo-Calvinism and from cultural anthropology, and the rich integration of that knowledge in the dialogue between the two disciplines as it relates to theological cultural engagement. In addition, I will show how this thesis is a development of Kuyperianism in the neo-Calvinist tradition. In developing a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement by taking Kuyperian ideas and reapplying them to new contexts, this approach may legitimately be called neo-Kuyperian.[912]

Neo-Calvinist scholar Vincent Bacote explains that it is not possible to simply apply Kuyper's theology to our contemporary situations; instead, we do the work of theology in the public square using Kuyperian methods, updating Kuyper's Calvinism in appropriate ways.[913] Just as Kuyper critically applied and updated Calvinism for his contemporary cultural context, thereby putting the *neo* in neo-Calvinism, so theologians standing in the same tradition critically apply and update Kuyperianism for our contemporary cultural contexts. In this thesis I have analysed certain aspects of Kuyper's theology, placed them in a dialogical relationship with cultural anthropology, and through the subsequent integrated knowledge of both disciplines I have updated them and renewed them to provide an approach to the cultural "other" that better reflects cultural complexity. In this sense, this thesis is neo-Kuyperian. For example, Mouw refers to the "enriching" of Kuyperian ideas that can come through a dialogue with Christian traditions outside of the Reformed tradition; in a similar way, I have sought to enrich Kuyperian ideas through a dialogue with cultural anthropology for the sake of enriching theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.[914]

7.1.2 A neo-Kuyperian approach to Christian cultural engagement

My primary research question concerned whether it was possible to develop a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement, one that gives credence to the fluctuating cultural complexities of cultural realities, cultural works, cultural worlds, cultural development, and all kinds of human cultural activity as they

[912] Mouw describes the work of applying Kuyper's ideas to our contemporary situation as "neo-Kuyperian." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 80.

[913] Bacote emphasises the importance of discerning what Kuyperian content theologians may take forward and what changes need to be made. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 155-156.

[914] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 79.

bear upon the cultural "other". I began to answer this question through a review of neo-Calvinism in its historical context in Chapter Two. A detailed description of how Calvinism became neo-Calvinism through the prolific and "remarkable" work of Abraham Kuyper formed the larger part of this Chapter.[915] I also referred to the early neo-Calvinist developments by Herman Bavinck and Klaas Schilder. This review was necessary to establish the foundation of neo-Calvinism as a discrete movement within the Reformed tradition. Chapter Three took on more of a neo-Kuyperian character as I reviewed the work of contemporary scholars who either stand directly in the Kuyperian line or whose work has been positively associated with it. Of their work it may be said that they have been in the business of developing and updating Kuyperian ideas.[916] Following a substantial two-chapter review of historical and contemporary neo-Calvinism, I undertook a survey of contemporary issues surrounding the meaning of "culture" in contemporary cultural anthropology in Chapter Four.[917] Having gathered together the broad concerns of both neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology I used those concerns to develop a dialogue between the two disciplines in Chapter Five to pursue a change in the practice of Christian cultural engagement. Through a textual, civil dialogue between neo-Calvinist and cultural anthropological voices that resulted in a consideration of diverse ideas, I suggested ways in which Christian cultural engagement might be renewed, and described a more systematic approach to the complex, cultural "other" in Chapter Six. In this Conclusion I will demonstrate how this framework is an updating of Kuyperian ideas to form a neo-Kuyperian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

7.1.3 Recapitulation of further research questions

Three further questions have stood behind the pursuit of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement which I discussed in Chapter One. Firstly, I asked what the advantages are of bringing together two distinct and different

[915] Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, xiii.

[916] For example, Mouw acknowledges that there are cultural challenges today that Kuyper would not have anticipated. This calls for an updating of Kuyperian ideas. Mouw writes: "The mandate is to see ourselves as being called by the Lord to promote the cause of his Kingdom on all of these square inches that for us are new territory for our walk of obedient service." Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 98.

[917] These issues surrounding the meaning of "culture" originated from the "writing culture" debate of the 1980's. See e.g., Clifford and Marcus, "Preface," vii-viii.

disciplines in dialogue to develop a renewed approach. I answered this question by describing how theology and anthropology serve as cultural reference points in this thesis by being each other's cultural "other" and by referring to the interdisciplinary context of integrating their concerns dialogically. Secondly, I discussed the problem with current theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition that necessitates a renewed approach. I answered this question by referring briefly to the work of three Reformed theologians in this area: Daniel Strange, Ted Turnau, and Donald A. Carson. Thirdly, I asked to what extent a renewed approach demonstrates faithfulness to the Reformed tradition, and neo-Calvinism in particular, and to what extent it pushes the boundaries? I answered this question with an explanation of how the concepts of post-cultural engagement and "otherness" show faithfulness to, and a development of, Kuyperian ideas. In this Conclusion I will briefly revise the second of these questions, with the main part of the chapter given over to discussing the other research questions.

7.1.4 Returning to the Reformed tradition

I identified the problem with some current approaches to theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition as being a lack of meaningful engagement with the complex cultural realities which influence cultural contexts and their cultural phenomena. Where the emphasis has been solely on the cultural works and trends of cultural realities there has been a superficial nod in the direction of the complex contexts behind them but no deeper dialogue. A further danger with this approach is that there is somewhat of a "blinkering" concerning theological doctrines which themselves are subject to cultural influences and change. A tradition's own cultural complexity is avoided in such approaches.[918] This thesis has been concerned with whether it is possible to find a different approach that involves a self-awareness of one's own cultural and theological context as well as developing an approach towards the "other" that takes

[918] For example, although it is acknowledged that the antithesis runs through all humanity, regenerate and unregenerate, there is little application of that concept to the theological doctrines being applied to "culture." Idols may also be present in the approaches to theological cultural engagement taken by Reformed theologians. See e.g.,

seriously the complex cultural realities standing behind cultural works and all human cultural activity.

In the Introduction to this thesis I briefly reviewed the theological cultural engagement of three Reformed scholars: Daniel Strange, Ted Turnau, and Donald Carson. Strange advocates the "subversive fulfilment model" of theological cultural engagement which places an emphasis on "culture" as religious expression.[919] In this approach all cultural phenomena will contain some form of idolatry; the Christian's task is to engage with a cultural trend (adult colouring books, for example) in order to expose its idolatrous narrative and subverting that narrative through evangelism whereby Christ replaces the idol(s).[920] Turnau's approach to engaging with popular cultural texts is similar. In fact, Turnau proposes that Christians ask five questions about a popular cultural text that expose idolatry and provide the opportunity to subvert the idolatry with biblical truth.[921] Carson's approach is different because it stems from an engagement with Niebuhr's influential book, *Christ and Culture*. Carson's theological cultural engagement is a corrective to Niebuhr's application of biblical theology, and while he still maintains a theology-over-"culture" approach (as opposed to a theology-in-conversation-with-"culture"), Carson does acknowledge the reality of cultural complexity and the difficulty of defining "culture."[922] All three approaches place an application of one specific type of Reformed theology in a hierarchical relationship with what each theologian determines as "culture", giving their particular approach a self-determining quality. In this regard, the cultural analysis of all three, including Carson, is

[919] Strange, *Plugged In*, 47.

[920] Adult colouring books represent a false "Utopia" that Strange calls "hope without substance." This idolatry narrative is redeemed through Christ in creation and new creation. Strange, *Plugged In*, 151-153.

[921] For example, Question Four is entitled: "What is False and Ugly and Perverse in This World (and How Can I Subvert It?" He suggests that Christians "ask specifically theological questions of the world of the text, and see where it leads. Likely, you will be led to the core idol, or complex of idols." Turnau, *Popologetics*, 234-235.

[922] Carson suggests that cultural analysis is affected by a person's cultural influences. He also acknowledges the reality of constant cultural change. However, even as Carson affirms cultural complexity and diversity, he still prefers to use the term "culture" when discussing how to talk about "Christ and culture." By continuing to use the term that commitment to complexity and diversity is sadly lost. See e.g., Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 73, 77, 79.

reductive because in varying degrees it does not dive deep enough into the complexities of cultural realities.

7.1.5 Religion and human cultural activity

The approaches of Strange, Turnau, and Carson are designed to equip the conservative evangelical Christian think biblically about the multiple cultural realities within which they operate on a daily basis. As such their work has merit in their particular sphere. In addition, the claim that "culture" is religious is not the problem: Kuyper also upheld the belief that the antithesis was at work in human cultural activity and that eventually non-Christian cultural development would set itself up against God in an absolute fashion.[923] All cultural realities have "religious ground motives" behind them which may be termed idolatrous.[924] Furthermore, the Kuyperian belief that Christ is ruler over all spheres in society is religious in itself and pervades all manner of cultural engagement.[925] However, even if all human cultural activity is religious or ideological in nature, what lies behind the multiple expressions of that religious or ideological root are complex cultural realities. The problem with the above approaches is that the religious root has become the only characteristic with which to engage, and the complexities of cultural contexts experienced by the cultural "other" are ignored.

7.1.6 A different approach

This thesis argues that it is possible to renew Christian cultural engagement in how it approaches the complex, cultural "other" as it takes into consideration complex layers of cultural processes and sociological interactions inherent in what is perceived as "culture." Taking the theological ideas of neo-Calvinism, a discrete movement within the Reformed tradition, and placing them in dialogue with cultural anthropological ideas of "culture", I demonstrated that it is possible to engage with the pluralism inherent in different cultural movements without the hints of colonisation in the above approaches. Bringing in the concerns of

[923] See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 540-542.
[924] See e.g., Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 11.
[925] This is why Carson says that "Christ" and "culture" cannot be talked about as mutually exclusive. God's sovereignty extends over all creation. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 62.

cultural anthropological ideas helped to illustrate that all theological movements themselves belong to particular cultural contexts, and are themselves evolving continually through cultural change, including the Reformed tradition. I have demonstrated that it is possible to develop an approach to Christian cultural engagement that takes into account these fluctuating layers of cultural complexity while remaining faithful to the Reformed tradition through neo-Calvinist theological ideas.

7.2 An Interdisciplinary Approach

What are the advantages of bringing together two distinct and different disciplines in dialogue to develop an approach to Christian cultural engagement that takes the cultural complexities of "the other" seriously? An interdisciplinary, collaborative method provides a different approach to the problem of cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition and in the Introduction I referred to divergence, contrast, complexity, collaboration, integration as being some of the characteristics which set interdisciplinary research apart from other kinds of research.[926] Another characteristic is the goal of a change in the practice of theological cultural engagement by integrating approaches from two distinct disciplines. This change in practice is built upon a recognition of the complexities of cultural realities behind all human cultural activity, a recognition that has stemmed from an integration of ideas from neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology.

7.2.1 Neo-Calvinism as dialogue partner

Through two substantial literature reviews that placed neo-Calvinism in historical and contemporary contexts I demonstrated that the complexities of this theological movement suggest that it is an appropriate foundation for a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement which is both rooted in the Reformed tradition and engages meaningfully with cultural realities. Because of a Kuyperian commitment to plurality, a free society, liberty of conscience, and cultural renewal, neo-Calvinism is poised to enrich a dialogical relationship between theology and cultural anthropology. In addition, neo-Calvinism

[926] Pahl and Facer, "Understanding Collaborative Research Practices – a Lexicon," 218.

demonstrates the self-awareness required for theology to engage culturally so that it does not fall into the same patterns of engaging as those described earlier.[927] Kuyperian principles encourage the continued reapplication of Calvinism to contemporary cultural challenges, carrying within it an implicit recognition that theological movements themselves are subject to cultural change.[928] In this thesis I have discussed the Kuyperian principles of common grace and sphere sovereignty, as well as the tension between these principles and special grace and the antithesis. I will briefly revise these principles below.

In Kuyper's view common grace flowed from special grace, and all the fruit of common grace flowed back into special grace, not as an end in itself but for a future harvest in the new creation.[929] Salvation of individuals is not, for Kuyper, the end point of God's purposes, but only so that Christ may glorify the Father, and God's perfection may be seen in all its abundance.[930] Sphere sovereignty demonstrates how God is active throughout the whole of creation, delegating authority to individual spheres, ruling over all created things through Christ, and working to bring human cultural development in its multiple forms to a glorious harvest. However, neither sphere sovereignty nor human cultural development are unaffected by sin, and Kuyper understood the full relationship between the antithesis and the operation of common grace in creation.[931] Without this application of the Calvinist notion of total depravity, common grace would lose its meaning because it would be indistinguishable from special grace.[932] A Kuyperian understanding of the antithesis means that engaging with cultural realities cannot be indiscriminate, and that ideological or religious narratives in cultural works can be acknowledged even in the context of cultural complexity *as long as those narratives also include the theological tradition itself*.[933]

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[927] As mentioned in the Introduction, Carson does acknowledge that it is impossible for Christians to escape "culture" but this also extends to the sphere of theology. See e.g., Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, xi.

[928] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

[929] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 552.

[930] Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 170.

[931] Ultimately, the process of sin will work against the purpose God gave to common grace in order to fight against God. See e.g., Kuyper, *Common Grace*, *Vol. 1*, 533.

[932] Kuyper was adamant that common grace was not salvific in any way.

[933] This means that there is room in theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition for works such as Daniel Strange's *Plugged In* alongside approaches which engage on a deeper level with cultural complexities.

In Chapter Two I described the Kuyperian distinction between the church as institute and organism, and his four terrains and their relationship to common grace. The former is the fruit of a two-fold grace – common and special – whereby believers are members of the sphere called the institutional church at the same time as being members of society.[934] The antithesis is always in view – it necessitates special grace by which believers are members of both the institutional church and the organic body of Christ operating in multiple spheres. In Kuyper's four terrains the relationship between the antithesis, common grace, and special grace is even more tightly defined: the extent of the influence of special grace and common grace is not equal across civilisations, and in some cultural contexts the extent of the Fall is more sharply pronounced.[935] These self-conscious complexities in Kuyperian cultural theology affirm the choice of neo-Calvinism as a dialogue partner for cultural anthropology in the pursuit of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

7.2.2 The place of Kuyperian ideas in renewing Christian cultural engagement

In this thesis I have demonstrated how Kuyperian ideas have contributed to a renewal of Christian cultural engagement in various ways. Firstly, through promoting the value of creation through Christ's cosmic rule, neo-Calvinism gives this approach a Christological foundation.[936] Secondly through sphere sovereignty, neo-Calvinism drives the theology in this approach to pursue, promote, and maintain cultural diversity and equality between different cultural communities.[937] In addition, sphere sovereignty contributes to the fostering of the engagement of Christians in all spheres of life, either through the church as institute or the church as organism. Thirdly, and as a caveat and to counteract the destructive trend of sphere sovereignty to promote separation, through Kuyper's campaign for individual liberty and freedom of conscience, neo-Calvinism provides a renewed approach with a commitment to justice, humility,

[934] Mouw explains this distinction in terms of the institutional church on the one hand and "the Kingdom" on the other hand. He also emphasises Kuyper's belief that this wasn't just about individual cultural involvement but about forming Christian groups in order to influence cultural development. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 58.

[935] Kuyper, "Common Grace," 199-200.

[936] In Kuyper's view, Christ is both Creator and Re-creator, connecting nature and grace, and extending the efficacy of salvation across the whole of the cosmos. See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 173.

[937] This is so that the whole operation of a flourishing society, held together in Christ, may be maintained and developed. See e.g., Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

mercy, and hospitality.[938] Fourthly, the idea of the realm of civilisation where special grace flows into common grace and back again creates a space in this approach for contextualised sharing of the Christian faith whereby unbelievers are invited to participate in the life of Christ. Through a combination of all the above, this renewed approach embraces cultural works and cultural development throughout society in order to reorient it towards the purposes of God and the glorification of Christ.

In this thesis I have advocated for neo-Calvinism being the most appropriate theological platform from which to practice Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. Throughout this thesis I have addressed some of the difficulties with Kuyper, primarily the destructive, colonial, racist application of sphere sovereignty (and Reformed theology in general) in South Africa, his attitude towards other races and towards women, and the difficulties with some of his later theological emphases.[939] However, even with these caveats in full view, the neo-Calvinist ideas described above, both in their original Kuyperian form and in their development by other neo-Calvinists from Bavinck to Mouw, establish a theological foundation for approaching the complex, cultural "other". This basis is wholly Christian; its source is Christ who rules the cosmos, made possible through Christ's work on the cross, and given future purpose through the recreating work of Christ and the promise of a final glorification. Crucially, it is also an inclusive foundation: Kuyper's vision is of a united, inclusive church organism, "the communion of saints" which "is not an idea which closes the door and shuts the windows; but, throwing doors and windows wide open, it walks through the four corners of the earth, searches the ages of the past, and looks forward into the ages to come." [940] When applied in this way, and informed by cultural anthropology, neo-Calvinism is able to provide a theological foundation for an approach to the complex, cultural "other" that is thoroughly Reformed, Christological, and inclusive.

[938] For example, in describing this kind of hospitality, Mouw writes: "Engagement with people of other perspectives should not be permeated by inviting them into our agenda; we need to take their questions, ideas, and concerns seriously." Mouw, *Adventures*, 212.

[939] This is why some Kuyperian ideas need updating and renewing for contemporary cultural challenges, including the issue of race. See e.g., Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 80-81.

[940] Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900), 550-551.

7.2.3 Cultural anthropology as dialogue partner

Having recapitulated the main Kuyperian ideas of neo-Calvinism and demonstrated their appropriateness and thoroughness for renewing an approach to Christian cultural engagement, what contribution has cultural anthropology made to this thesis? The decision to include a study of cultural anthropology sprang from the concern that when theologians in the Reformed tradition spoke about "culture" it was clear that this term was confused, complicated, and used as a catch-all for any influence outside the walls of the institutional church.[941] To understand what "culture" is without theological labels attached to it by the Reformed tradition, and in pursuit of a definition, I turned to the field of cultural anthropology. Despite the different starting-points for theology and anthropology, each discipline stood as the other's complex, cultural "other" and so provided a reference point for the renewal of Christian cultural engagement. With respect to the anthropological voices referred to in this thesis, at first glance, "culture" refers to cultivation and the building of civilisations.[942] Different cultural anthropologists bring different ideas and conclusions to the question of what constitutes "culture," but they all share a common thread: that "culture" itself cannot be easily defined, and that, in fact, the very idea of "culture" may be a phantom.[943] I have used these insights as a lens through which to view theological cultural engagement in order to move towards a new approach with neo-Calvinism.

7.2.4 Cultural complexity and theology

Grasping the concept that "culture" refers to a complex network of interrelated and conflicting processes led to a fuller understanding of how theology might relate in different ways at different times to those processes. Cultural processes are always in flux. In Chapter Four I described how this flux is contributed to when ethnographers write about "culture."[944] An objective approach to cultural

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[941] Even Strange's definition that "culture" refers to "the stories we tell that express meaning about the world" give the impression that this happens outside of the church. What is implied is that the stories we tell inside the church are Christian and therefore not part of "culture" in this understanding. Strange, *Plugged In*, 23.

[942] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 25.

[943] This refers to Aguilar's claim that human beings "do not share a culture." Aguilar, "Changing Models," 307.

[944] This is in reference to the "writing culture" debate that emerged amongst cultural anthropologists in 1984.

analysis is impossible because the analyst is always influenced by the cultural lenses they wear. Subjective interpretation is unavoidable. Because writing about "culture" brings such changes, ethnographers must maintain the awareness of the partiality that they bring to their cultural analysis.[945]

In this thesis I have demonstrated that this cultural complexity further complicates any attempt to engage theologically with the cultural "other". In a partial sense, theologians who attempt to write about cultural artefacts, cultural works, cultural influences, cultural movements and so on are undertaking work similar to that of an ethnographer. A theologian standing in a particular theological position, with the express intention of applying that theological position willy-nilly to "culture", cannot avoid subjective interpretation, and in doing so changes the meaning of the cultural context with which they are engaging. All cultural engagement is slippery: as Clifford writes, ""cultures" do not hold still for their portraits."[946] Ethnographers must take into account this slippery nature of continually fluctuating cultural processes as they study and write about human cultural behaviour, with self-awareness as a key component in their work. Countering the inevitability of viewing cultural communities from the subjective view of the ethnographer, viewing them from the point of view of the members of those communities leads to a fuller picture. It enables the analyst to give faithful accounts of "the other" rather than binding them to notions of their cultural past.[947] This also holds true of the theologian who views "the other" only through the lenses of a idolatrous narrative rather than allowing "the other" to speak. This binds them to the theologian's notions of their cultural traditions and may prevent faithful cultural analysis from taking place.

7.2.5 Kuyper and cultural anthropology

I have suggested above that neo-Calvinism relates well to the dynamism present in interrelated cultural processes because of its pre-disposition to plurality and interconnectedness, and the fact that it is a self-aware movement, albeit with some serious blindspots in terms of race-consciousness and gender equality. Nevertheless, Kuyper's various manifestos for applying the Calvinist

[945] Clifford, "Introduction," 18.
[946] Clifford, "Introduction," 10.
[947] See e.g., Rollason, "Introduction," 7-8.

life-system to society demonstrates that he understood his own ability to influence the areas of cultural life he engaged with politically and socially.[948] However, Kuyper's commitment to liberty for every citizen and freedom of conscience, his concern for the poor, and his emphasis on common grace evokes a strong sense of Christian "otherness" and for love of neighbour, and these theological qualities must take a higher profile in cultural engagement.[949] Seeking "otherness" is found in a pursuit of freedom of conscience and equality, where individual human beings, as well as spheres, are allowed to live up to their God-given calling.[950] These points of commonality between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism move the contribution of cultural anthropology from being a key to defining "culture" to being a dialogue partner with neo-Calvinism in the pursuit of a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

7.3 From Dialogue to a "Co-operatively Evolved Text"

In pursuing the primary aim of this thesis to renew Christian cultural engagement in relation to the complex, cultural "other" I pursued a dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology for the purposes of developing a more systematic, theological approach. Along with Mouw's commitment to dialogue, I partly drew inspiration from anthropologist Stephen Tyler's reference to ethnography being a "co-operatively evolved text".[951] My intention was that a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement would be a "text" that had "co-operatively evolved" through this dialogue. Using the Kuyperian ideas and specific features of neo-Calvinism reiterated above, with the perspectives of cultural anthropologists concerning the meaning of "culture", I was able to explore the three main areas stated in Chapter One which drew out an integration of knowledge from both. These areas concerned the meaningfulness and indefinability of cultural worlds, the challenges of being both contextual and faithful in pursuing an approach that demands multiple

[948] This is evidenced in his impassioned speech at the opening of the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam: his argument for why it was necessary to found a specifically Christian university, free to operate within its own sphere without interference from the state is just one example that demonstrates that Kuyper understood the scope of the influence of his application of Calvinism on society. Kuyper, "Sphere sovereignty," 472.

[949] See e.g., Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 69.

[950] Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 32.

[951] Tyler, "Post-modern Ethnography," 125.

perspectives, and the impact that a positive view of creation can have in considering the cultivation and harvest of cultural works.

7.3.1 Cultural worlds: meaningful and indefinable

Firstly, I concluded that when "culture" is treated as an objective, singular, definable entity by a theological tradition then it is questionable what kind of engagement is taking place. It is entirely possible that all theology is engaging with is a myth of its own making; a myth that goes beyond the poetical evocation of a cultural context suggested by Tyler. To minimise this, all cultural engagement, including theological, must respect, pay attention to, and interact with specific social and cultural contexts. It must also bear in mind the diverse cultural influences of members of different cultural worlds and the complex interrelatedness of cultural processes and must be broad enough to take into consideration the changes that such fluctuating cultural processes bring about; changes which reflect God's purposes for human cultural development. It is this that causes cultural worlds to be at the same time meaningful and indefinable. This means that theologians in the Reformed tradition achieve nothing when they apply their theological ideas to "culture" in formulaic fashion without digging far deeper into cultural complexities.

7.3.2 Complexity and "messiness"

Similarly, even when theologians have taken into consideration the complexity of cultural processes, in applying their theology to different cultural situations and various cultural phenomena, they must remember that they do not do so in a vacuum but bring their own cultural influences and the cultural contexts of their theological tradition with them. In this sense they are active in changing the cultural world with which they are engaging, and therefore cannot view it objectively. This subjectivity contributes to cultural fluctuations and "messiness" of cultural interactions.[952] In fact, when theology is applied to cultural processes it does effect a change of some description. Kuyper shows some understanding of this as evidenced in his belief that Calvinism was a phase in human cultural development "whose high calling is still to influence the further course of human

[952] "Messiness" is one of the hallmarks of methodological pluralism according to Pahl and Facer. Pahl and Facer, "Understanding Collaborative Research Practices – a Lexicon," 218.

life."[953] Reformed theologians who desire to see change through the effect of their theological cultural engagement would do well to remember that their attempts to write about "culture" will inevitably bring about some kind of change. Whether or not this is the influence that Kuyper hoped for will depend on what tools they use in their writing and engaging. As stated throughout this thesis, theological imperatives of social, economic, racial, and gender justice must be part of that change.

7.3.3 A multiplex approach: contextual and faithful

Secondly, I concluded that these tools required by theologians to deal with the above issues of indefinability and self-awareness involve the holding of multiple perspectives. Doing so upholds cultural diversity, and the plurality of different spheres, different cultural worlds, and the equality of those spheres. Insights from both cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism support this idea of multiperspectivalism; Kuyper's commitment to "many-ness" embraces cultural diversity and plurality in an organic society in which its various spheres work together while remaining sovereign in their own right.[954] Because there is no hierarchy of spheres, the sphere of Reformed theology does not hold more sway than other spheres. This is vital for the approach of Christian cultural engagement towards the complex, cultural "other". Because of the antithesis running through every member of each sphere or cultural world theology cannot assume a priority over and against "culture." This dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism has crystallized my argument that a theological tradition is itself just another sphere or cultural world, sovereign in its own right, but fallible and in equal relationship with other spheres, therefore any kind of theology when it is applied to "culture" is not supreme.

7.3.4 The Kingdom is bigger than the institutional church

Related to this argument for multiple perspectives is the holding of the idea that "kingdom work" is not confined to evangelism, mission, and preaching.[955] This is

[953] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 22.
[954] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 20-21.
[955] In his distinction between the church as institute and the Kingdom Mouw is clear that Kingdom work is not confined to what happens within the walls of the institutional church. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 58.

because, like a theological tradition, the church as a distinct cultural world or sphere also does not have a priority over any other cultural world that Christians inhabit. Kuyper's distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism is also vital to theological cultural engagement. Christians remain the organic body of Christ in all the cultural worlds in which they operate and return to the institutional body of Christ (the church sphere) as their base of operations.[956] However, their return to the base of operations is not so that they engage with other cultural worlds from within the trenches, throwing out theological hand grenades into the enemy ("culture") or so that they advance from the battlements with an aggressive, conquering agenda to bring "culture" under their control. Instead, based on Kuyper's Christological foundation, the organic body of Christ operates in multiple spheres for the common good, inviting other members of those spheres to participate in the life of the Christ who already rules over the cosmos.

7.3.5 Creation: cultivation and harvest

Thirdly, through this dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology I concluded that theological cultural engagement requires a positive view of creation. A respect for the cultivation of creation by all human beings whether believers or not, that is based upon Kuyper's common grace, is vital to theological cultural engagement. Cultural anthropology is the study of human behaviour and charts the changes and progress in human civilisation. There is an expectation that humans will continue to change and develop culturally as they continue cultivating their changing environments. Similarly, neo-Calvinism upholds God's purposes that human beings should continue develop culturally, cultivating creation according to his purposes.[957] If these are God's purposes then any kind of Christian cultural engagement must take this into consideration and apply a positive view to creation and its cultivation by all peoples. Doing so characterizes a renewed approach to the complex, cultural "other".

[956] Kuyper, "The Blurring of the Boundaries," 397.

[957] The Calvinist life-system allows human development to achieve its fullest God-given potential. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 53.

7.3.6 A gathering of cultural works.

However, there was a difference between cultural anthropological and neo-Calvinist views of the future of cultural development. Whereas insights from cultural anthropology suggest that conflict and fragmentation may be features of future cultural development, neo-Calvinist views all cultural processes as moving towards a goal.[958] The idea that cultural works will be gathered in at the end of history relies upon the belief that Christ's redemption extends to the entire cosmos.[959] A Kuyperian understanding of the distinction between the fruit of common grace and the fruit of special grace is vital here because it leads to an embracing of the cultural works of others.[960] It also leads to a sense of "otherness" because diverse cultural identities and contexts (as the fruit of common grace) can be seen from the perspective of "the other".[961] This is vital for a meaningful theological cultural engagement. A positive view of creation is inextricably bound up with this relationship between common grace and special grace: it facilitates the sharing of life stories, and opportunities for a mutual stepping into the other's shoes, in order to invite those others to participate in the life of Christ.

7.3.7 A renewed approach for new contemporary cultural challenges

The fruit of this dialogue between neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology is the renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement expounded in Chapter Six. It is an expansion of the above ideas and further draws out neo-Calvinist ideas into principles of justice, mercy, humility and hospitality. These principles have been influenced by a dialogue with cultural anthropology because of insights into the complexity of cultural processes, a need for humility and self-awareness in ethnography, and a quest for a sense of "otherness". In addition, these principles are all either explicitly or implicitly present in Kuyper's foundational ideas of sphere sovereignty, common grace, the antithesis, and the distinction between the church as institute and organism, in his pursuit of liberty of conscience and justice for the poor, and in his unshakeable belief that

[958] See e.g., Eller, *Cultural Anthropology*, 384-387.

[959] This is the belief that in Christ all things may be restored to a right relationship with God. See e.g., Bavinck, *The Sacrifice of Praise*, 83.

[960] See e.g., Kuyper, "Common Grace," 196

[961] This can lead to what Mouw calls "a spirit of genuine learning" between different cultural and religious communities. Mouw, *Adventures*, 186.

it was possible to influence the cultural processes at work in his own context for the common good through a Calvinist life-system.[962] For a balanced neo-Kuyperian approach to Christian cultural engagement that embraces equality and justice for the complex, cultural "other" these above characteristics must temper any application of sphere sovereignty.

7.3.8 A post-cultural framework for theological cultural engagement

Integrating the above Kuyperian principles with the concerns of cultural anthropology has enabled a renewal of Christian cultural engagement and provided different perspectives through which to view the primary research question of this thesis. One such perspective was created through moving theological cultural engagement away from bounded notions of "culture."[963] Cultural complexity from both a Kuyperian and an anthropological perspective requires an acknowledgment that "culture" as an easily identifiable and definable object is a myth.[964] Leaving behind the catch-all idea of "culture" and the bonds that it places upon human beings and people groups, means that theological cultural engagement needs to be post-cultural in its approach. A key characteristic of a post-cultural theological engagement is "otherness" because in a post-cultural approach "the other" is set free from the preconceived ideas that the analyst has about them, both in terms of their current cultural works and also in terms of their future.[965] As I explained in Chapter Six, this "otherness" can be discovered in Kuyperian sphere sovereignty: in the notion of the individual's conscience being a sphere in its own right, not liable to coercion or manipulation by another sphere.[966] However, this must be held against the over-emphasis on separateness that leads to a theological justification of separation on any social grounds. A post-cultural framework for theological cultural engagement with the hallmark of "otherness" will encourage the holding of simultaneous multiple perspectives, self-awareness of cultural lenses, and

[962] For example, the pursuit of civil liberty was a supremely Christian act that benefitted all Dutch citizens regardless of their beliefs. See e.g., Kuyper, *Our Program*, 8-9.

[963] This came about through integrating Kuyperian sphere sovereignty with the anthropological view that "culture" consists "of seriously contested codes and representations." Clifford, "Introduction," 2.

[964] See e.g., Aguilar, "Changing Models," 307.

[965] See e.g., Rollason, "Introduction," 7-8.

[966] Kuyper writes: "Conscience is therefore the shield of the human person, the root of all civil liberties, the source of a nation's happiness." Kuyper, *Our Program*, 73.

the active seeking of the good of "the other".[967] This integration of both cultural anthropological and Kuyperian ideas provides the content and future direction for a post-cultural approach to theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition.

7.4 Neo-Kuyperian and Reformed?

At the heart of this thesis is the question of whether it is possible to renew Christian cultural engagement, one that takes into account the depth of cultural complexity in cultural realities and is able to interact with "the other" that allows them to flourish in their own right. I employed three further research questions to compliment this primary question: 1) what are the distinct advantages of bringing together two distinct and different disciplines in dialogue to develop a renewed approach? 2) what is the problem with current theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition that necessitates a renewed approach? 3) to what extent does a renewed approach demonstrate faithfulness to the Reformed tradition, and neo-Calvinism in particular, and to what extent does it push the boundaries? This final section of my conclusion concerns this third question. If a renewal of Christian cultural engagement has taken place, how might others continue to renew it? I will offer two ways in which I have elaborated the ideas contained within Kuyperianism and suggest how they might continue to develop.

7.4.1 An extension of sphere sovereignty

Firstly, I have explored the different kinds of impact of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and built upon a positive view of this idea by bringing together the spheres of cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism in close relation. The purpose for relating these two distinct spheres in this way was to effect a change in the practice of theological cultural engagement. To this end I brought these spheres together to work in such a way as would enrich the flourishing of both.[968] In relating these two spheres in this way and allowing the complexity of

[967] This holds both diversity and commonness together at the same time. Mouw, *Adventures*, 136-139.

[968] In some respects, this is an extension of sphere sovereignty in the sense that when spheres flourished in their organic relations with each other then so did society. See e.g., Kuyper, *Our Program*, 20-21.

their individual characters to “talk to each other” is somewhat an extension of sphere sovereignty, as is the idea that the integration of ideas from both will multiply perspectives and contribute to cultural complexity. Kuyper was an advocate of pluriformity, of “many-ness,” and of plural cultural spheres operating together organically in order that human society might flourish. In this sense, cultural pluralism carries with it a sense of dynamism due to the movement of human beings between the spheres they inhabit. This dynamic cultural pluralism combined with Kuyper’s belief that Calvinism would once again influence the course of human development must result in new, plural forms in which the church as organism may operate.[969] A renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement developed through dialogue between cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism is one such new form of cultural pluralism and an extension of sphere sovereignty.

7.4.2 Sphere sovereignty: denied?

However, bringing neo-Calvinism and cultural anthropology together in dialogue stretches the category of sphere sovereignty by suggesting that it is possible to birth something new from the collaboration between two spheres. This could be viewed as a blurring of the boundaries between the spheres.[970] At the same time as promoting a society of many diverse spheres, Kuyper was adamant that Christians should form a distinct circle – a life-system – that preserved the boundaries that God had ordained for creation.[971] This was the basis for his sphere sovereignty which was itself a reaction against encroaching pantheistic ideas and evolutionary philosophy that he observed influencing more and more of Western Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. He saw the battle as being not against the development of human life as God purposes it but against the process of modernity by which natural distinctions were being collapsed into a uniformity where everything is one and the same. If by bringing together two spheres like the neo-Calvinist “life-system” and the cultural anthropological “life-

[969] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 130.

[970] Kuyper would have abhorred the encroaching of one sphere onto another, therefore it is vital that any integration of the knowledge from cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism is distinct from any thought of merging the two spheres. See e.g., Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 468.

[971] The establishment of a Christian university was an example of this: such an establishment promoted freedom of conscience and allowed Christians to operate in a distinctly Christian academic sphere. See e.g., Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 472.

system" I am blurring the boundaries between the two and entering into an evolutionary process by which something *uniform* emerges then my development of the tradition would fall outside Kuyperianism.

7.4.3 Sphere sovereignty: extended

In Chapter Four I explained that one of the goals of interdisciplinary research is to preserve the distinctions between the disciplines, and that what is being integrated is not the disciplines themselves but the specialist knowledge from each *in order to solve a problem*.[972] A shared vocabulary that arises from this integration is useful for moving forward in problem-solving, but it does not negate the distinctive vocabulary of each discipline. In fact, it is vital for this distinct, specialist vocabulary to remain in the background because it represents the different, particular ideas and principles of distinct disciplines. For this thesis the point of integrating the specialist knowledge of Kuyperianism and cultural anthropology, and the ensuing shared vocabulary, has been to ameliorate theological cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. This is therefore not a blurring of the boundaries of the two spheres; it is not a collapsing of distinctions between two disciplines; it is not a surrender to an evolutionary process whereby cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism merge into one another. My method has been to research the relevant ideas within both disciplines, to take the knowledge gleaned from this research and integrate it to form a new approach to theological cultural engagement which combines multiple perspectives. In doing so I have upheld Kuyper's sphere sovereignty while at the same time as upholding cultural complexity. This extension of sphere sovereignty in interdisciplinary research through a dialogue with cultural anthropology has helped to form an answer to the primary research question of this thesis and has also provided a tempering to the extreme application of separation lurking in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty.

[972] In collaborative research, knowledge from different disciplines is brought together in order to solve problems and change practice. For example, Organizational Complexity scholars, Lorino, Tricard, and Clot consider dialogues as vital to the narrative of collaboration; as aiming at building "something new together, in quest of purpose." Philippe Lorino, Benoît Tricard, and Yves Clot, "Research Methods for Non-Representational Approaches to Organizational Complexity: The Dialogical Mediated Inquiry," (pp 769-801 in Organization Studies 32(6), 2011), 795.

7.4.4 Cultural anthropology and neo-Calvinism: a fruitful relationship

From the above description of the extension of sphere sovereignty in this thesis, I have demonstrated a development of the neo-Calvinism movement through a dialogue with cultural anthropology in order to change the practice of theological cultural engagement. However, there is a further potential for fruitfulness contained in this relationship. Kuyper desired purity in the institutional church, a purity that would shine from the lives of Christians in their Christian spheres, and a purity that would push forward the cultural development of societies towards God's purposes for creation through common grace.[973] While he advocated the distinction of the institutional church as the guardian of special grace and urged its members to jealously guard that inner circle from the temptations of pantheistic philosophies, he expected the life within that sphere to tumble out to the whole of society.[974] By extension, the dialogical relationship between neo-Calvinism (a distinctly Christian sphere) and cultural anthropology provides a platform whereby the fruits of special grace may tumble out into a renewed approach to theological cultural engagement.[975]

7.4.5 Neo-Kuyperian "otherness" in post-cultural engagement

Secondly, I am suggesting that Christian cultural engagement can be post-cultural in character by an avoidance of binding cultural groups to notions of what kinds of cultural works they will produce in the future based on their past.[976] I have suggested that it is possible and vital to read a post-cultural narrative in Kuyper's commitment to liberty of conscience whereby the individual is shielded from any kind of tyranny: "freedom of expression, freedom of belief, freedom of worship; but above all these freedoms: freedom of conscience."[977] It is vital because it tempers the stretching of boundaries in

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[973] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 51.

[974] Kuyper, "Common Grace," 195.

[975] This depends on the distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism: Neo-Calvinism as a distinctly Christian theological sphere is a fruit of special grace, informed by the Christian faith of the institutional church. As an outworking of God's common grace this sphere is able to relate to the sphere of cultural anthropology thereby multiplying the influence of special grace beyond the walls of the institutional church. For example, Kuyper writes: "The church of Christ has almost nowhere established a lasting presence without also modifying the general outlook on life beyond its institutional walls." Kuyper, "Common Grace," 195.

[976] See e.g., Robbins, "Is the Future Beyond Culture?" 709.

[977] See Kuyper, *Our Program*, 69.

sphere sovereignty to lead to separation, segregation, inequality, and exclusion. In addition, a post-cultural approach to cultural analysis leads to a sense of "otherness" where "the other" is considered in their own right, as opposed to being considered only through the lenses of a particular discourse.[978] There is a legitimate sense of "otherness" in Kuyper's theology: his exhortation for Christians to alleviate the suffering of the poor is evidence of this, in which he recalls the sacrifice of Christ who suffered both for and with human beings.[979] This demonstrates that "otherness" is not a new idea emerging solely from the sphere of cultural anthropology because it is inherent in the biblical idea of love of neighbour.[980] Using the lens of cultural anthropology I have drawn out the "otherness" implied in Kuyper and in that sense this idea is neo-Kuyperian. As "otherness" is a hallmark of post-cultural analysis, by extension this is also implicitly Kuyperian, and a further development of the movement.

7.4.6 Can a neo-Kuyperian approach ever be post-colonial?

Notwithstanding the above argument for Kuyperian "otherness" there remains in neo-Calvinism the legacy of Kuyper's attitudes towards the Netherlands' overseas colonies. In a thesis concerning Christian cultural engagement, that advocates for cultural complexity and a sense of "otherness" analysis, colonialism must be taken seriously. Kuyper fully supported the colonial cause and considered the possession of colonies "a privilege that others envy."[981] In addition, he supported the Christianization of colonies and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to replace all kinds of indigenous idolatry.[982] In fact, this was his driving motivation for colonization; not for Dutch profit (he abhorred exploitation of the Javanese, for example),[983] but for the salvation of souls and the honour of Jesus Christ.[984] This is resonant with idolatry narratives in other contemporary Reformed approaches to theological cultural engagement and its

[978] This discourse may be one of modern theories of development, for example. See e.g., Rollason, "Introduction," 2-3.

[979] Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, 69.

[980] This is exactly what Robbins was trying to avoid in his argument that anthropology could pursue "otherness" without reference to Christian ideas and practices. See e.g., Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology," 8.

[981] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 299.

[982] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 307.

[983] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 303-304.

[984] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 307.

application in South Africa has been discussed in this thesis.[985] However, Kuyper himself still held to the principle of liberty of conscience. While not advocating neutrality about Christianity amongst the members of colonies, Kuyper advocated "the Christian principle…which desires to triumph in no other way that through persuasion."[986] Kuyper cannot be called post-colonial, but there are concessions of "otherness" even in his support for overseas colonies. Consequently, taking into consideration his commitment to social justice in the Netherlands, there is justification in pursuing a post-colonial, post-cultural, neo-Kuyperian approach to theological cultural engagement particularly where the theological, cultural, and deeply personal question of what it means to be African and Reformed remains.[987]

7.4.7 Justice, mercy, humility, hospitality

In Chapter Six I suggested four characteristics present in neo-Calvinism that might form the basis for pursuing otherness in theological cultural engagement. These four characteristics are justice, mercy, humility, and hospitality. These four characteristics are not arbitrary but drawn from principles both explicit and implicit in Kuyperianism and subsequent neo-Calvinist developments. For example, they exist in the commitment to commonness and civility, in the pursuit of public justice, and in the principle of cultural pluralism.[988] They also exist in the affirmation of an individual's right to be distinct from others at the same time as being equal to others.[989] That is vital for the theological foundation for a renewed approach to the complex, cultural "other". These characteristics renew the sense of "otherness" implicit in Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, wherein the individual is free to live up to the unique character given to them by God but is not separate from their organic relationship with other individual human

[985] As stated previously, as Africans encountered the Reformed theological tradition, they quickly realised that their own African traditions and values were no longer acceptable under their colonisers and required fully replacing through imposition. See e.g., Tshaka, "On being African and Reformed?" 4.

[986] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 310.

[987] For Boesak writing in 1984, the struggle was to understand how the Christian gospel is related to the oppressive system of apartheid. If apartheid was a "pseudo-gospel" then what should be the church's response? Being African and Reformed was, and still is, "a struggle for wholeness through liberation." Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 48.

[988] They are also inherent in Kuyper's vision of development through the Calvinist life-system. Kuyper, *Lectures*, 53.

[989] Diversity and equality are integral to a post-cultural theological cultural engagement that pursues "otherness". See e.g., Kuyper, *Lectures*, 30.

beings in a common humanity.[990] These characteristics also bring together both unity and diversity in their right relationship as evidenced in the Belhar Confession.[991] Advocating freedom of conscience in all spheres, defending the right of all members of society to be free and equal citizens, prioritising the poor and excluded, and upholding commonness: these are rich expressions of otherness. Notwithstanding the actual and important difficulties also found in Kuyperianism, both "otherness" and a post-cultural approach are ideas nurtured within his theological ideas.[992] Applying them to new contexts makes this approach neo-Kuyperian.

7.5 Conclusion: Approaching the Complex, Cultural "Other": Towards a Renewal of Christian Cultural Engagement in the Reformed Tradition

In conclusion, this thesis is both neo-Calvinist and neo-Kuyperian: the theological ideas developed in this thesis stand in the neo-Calvinist tradition, with the Reformed Calvinist tradition as its backdrop, but I have taken Kuyperian ideas and extended, updated, and renewed them. This extension has been largely due to the work of contemporary neo-Calvinists, but my part has been to place Kuyper's ideas in dialogue with cultural anthropology and allow them to engage robustly with cultural anthropological concerns. In doing so I have demonstrated that neo-Calvinism constitutes a strong theological foundation for cultural engagement in the Reformed tradition. It is this strong

[990] Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, 32.

[991] The Confession of Belhar stands in the Reformed tradition and in its battle against separation and exclusion on any social grounds engages implicitly with the Kuyperian tradition. It holds within it a Kuyperian passion for the poor and marginalised and promotes diversity only in the context of unity. "Confession of Belhar."

[992] In doing this I have not glossed over the more difficult views held by Kuyper in terms of race, his attitude to the English in the Boer War, and the way he talks about Dutch overseas colonies; attitudes which have influenced separatist, apartheid attitudes. In addition, his views on the family and feminism, and related gender issues are problematic in the 21st century. I gave these issues space in chapters one and concluded that although they *are* challenging views to grapple with, they do not in and of themselves provide justification for dismissing Kuyper's general principles. He wrote with great self-awareness, and out of his own historical and cultural context, but these views are applications of his principles; they do not denote an exhaustive function of those principles. Instead they point to the enormous influence that cultural and historical contexts have on a person's worldview which is why self-awareness is vital in all kinds of theological cultural engagement.

foundation which, informed by cultural anthropological ideas, that has enabled a renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement.

7.5.1 Ongoing renewal

Through a dialogue with cultural anthropology I have developed a neo-Kuyperian approach to Christian cultural engagement that is self-reflective, and open to change and further development. This ongoing renewal is in keeping with the nature and inevitability of cultural change, and the progression of human cultural development towards its highest goal. Crucially, it continues to prioritise the ongoing complexities of the cultural "other". As well as maintaining a degree of openness and self-reflexivity, this renewed approach is able to hold multiple cultural perspectives at once, taking into account the specific social contexts of cultural phenomena. It makes distinctions between those social contexts and the members of those social contexts with their individual and collective complex cultural relationships. It provides a foundation for engagement with diverse cultural worlds in a way that preserves relationships, and love of neighbour, and encourages the continued development of cultural works of members of all cultural worlds. It tempers the controversial application of sphere sovereignty with a commitment to social justice in a way that remains open to further renewal. In short, a renewal of Christian cultural engagement that upholds the cultural and theological complexities of the "other" must itself be complex; it keeps open the spaces between theological ideas and cultural realities without collapsing them into one anonymous, unidentifiable, indistinguishable concept called "culture."

7.5.2 A Christian approach to the complex, cultural "other"

I conclude that this renewed approach to Christian cultural engagement is a viable alternative to other kinds of theological cultural analysis in the Reformed tradition. Wherever possible it avoids any attempt to dominate, decode, convert, subvert and fulfil existing cultural worlds with all their cultural complexities. Instead it prioritises justice, humility, hospitality, and mercy as characteristics of the neo-Calvinist tradition to which is belongs. This approach encourages, respects, invites, celebrates, and redeems all cultural works according to God's purposes for creation and human cultural development. This approach is

distinctly Christian because Christ is the one from whom all human cultural development comes, and in whom all human cultural development is held together. It upholds all "kingdom work" and promotes the inclusiveness of the Christian gospel, while remaining distinctly Christian. Finally, this renewed approach stands in the line of development of Calvinism which Kuyper anticipated ahead of his time: "[T]he development of the principles of Calvinism in accordance with the needs of our modern consciousness, and their application to every department of life."[993] This Neo-Kuyperian, Christian cultural engagement addresses the complexities of cultural realities at the same time as upholding the wholeness of life under the sovereign rule of Christ.[994] It facilitates the celebration of diversity and many-ness in creation that reflects the divine image, at the same time as upholding a Christological commitment to reconciliation, commonness, and unity that promotes justice, humility, mercy, and hospitality.[995] Through a dialogue with cultural anthropology, I have developed Kuyper's Calvinism for a contemporary age, and in doing so have enabled the beginning of a renewal of Christian cultural engagement that is imbued with the ability to self-direct change and application in all its approaches to the complex, cultural "other".

[993] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 148.

[994] Sharing the Kuyperian belief in the sovereign rule of Christ over every square inch of life, Boesak writes: "Therein lies my hope: that the church of Jesus Christ will yet discover the gospel of liberation and hope for human fulfilment and wholeness. The challenge to the church is to discover and implement that gospel: to become whole itself, and to work for the wholeness of life everywhere in the world." Boesak, *Black and Reformed*, 50.

[995] This is diversity and unity as exemplified in the Confession of Belhar: "We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God." "The Confession of Belhar."

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