

COMMON GRACE AND HERMENEUTICS: UTILIZING ABRAHAM KUYPER'S COMMON GRACE FOR FACING CHANGES IN HERMENEUTICS

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ABSTRACT: This article tries to further the suggestion of utilizing the concept of common grace popularized by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) for facing changes in hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has changed in many ways because of the influences of modernism and postmodernism. In contrast to more liberal theologians who promote those changes actively, evangelical theologians tend to respond negatively or hesitantly. After describing briefly those hermeneutical changes, this article investigates Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. As conclusion, it provides some suggestions on to what extent the concept of common grace can be utilized for reconsidering changes in hermeneutics as favourable opportunities to develop more the field of hermeneutics.

KEYWORDS: *hermeneutics; Abraham Kuyper; common grace.*

ABSTRAK: Artikel ini mencoba untuk melanjutkan usulan pemanfaatan konsep common grace yang dipopulerkan oleh Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) untuk menghadapi perubahan hermeneutika. Hermeneutika telah berubah dalam banyak hal karena pengaruh modernisme dan postmodernisme. Berbeda dengan para teolog liberal yang mempromosikan perubahan-perubahan tersebut secara aktif, para teolog injili cenderung menanggapi secara negatif atau ragu-ragu. Setelah menjelaskan secara singkat perubahan dalam bidang hermeneutika, artikel ini menyelidiki konsep Kuyper tentang anugerah umum. Sebagai kesimpulan, artikel ini memberikan beberapa saran tentang sejauh mana konsep anugerah umum dapat digunakan untuk mempertimbangkan kembali perubahan dalam hermeneutika sebagai

peluang baik untuk mengembangkan bidang hermeneutika.

KATA KUNCI: *hermeneutika; Abraham Kuyper; anugerah umum.*

Hermeneutical study has changed significantly because of the influences of modernism and postmodernism. While in its traditional form hermeneutics set rules for interpreting religious texts, now it became a science that deals with the understanding process without fixed texts. Moises Silva views that although a large number of more liberal theologians accept and promote changes in hermeneutics, not few theologians, mostly from more evangelical camps, refuse or hesitate to embrace those changes. Rejecting these two options, he proposes a way that is grounded in the doctrine of common grace.¹ He describes common grace as rooted in Calvin's idea of appreciating human learning and refers to Van Til as the one who shows the doctrine of common grace clearly.

Although Silva does not mention it explicitly, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) is the one who develops and popularizes the concept of common grace.² While Kuyper's influence in his country has noticeably decreased, but recently get renewed interest in North America.³ Some American theologians believe that research on Kuyper could provide valuable hints for twenty-first century Christians. For example, Richard Mouw states, "Yet almost a century after his passing, he still has some vital insights to offer about Christian cultural and political discipleship."⁴ Moreover, James Bratt says that Kuyper is "distinct among the Evangelical of his time and useful for Evangelical, and other, Christians today." He also shows that Kuyper "could—and would—not have been a postmodernist, but he anticipated some varieties of that position in a striking way."⁵

How does Kuyper elaborate the concept of common grace and to what extent this concept can be utilized to equip evangelical camps in facing changes in hermeneutics today? To answer the above-mentioned research question, this article will describe the hermeneutical changes in the first section. Afterward, the second part will examine Kuyper's doctrine

¹ Moises Silva, "The Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, by Walter C. Kaiser and Silva Moises (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 298–303.

² Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 117. Van Til calls Kuyper the "theologian of common grace."

³ John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), xi–xii.

⁴ Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), xi.

⁵ James D. Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper: His World and Work," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

of common grace.⁶ Lastly, based on two previous sections I will suggest on how the concept of common grace could contribute to the evangelicals in reconsidering changes in hermeneutics as favourable opportunities to develop more the field of hermeneutics.

I. Changes in Hermeneutics

Thiselton defines hermeneutics as an exploration on “how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own.”⁷ In sixth century BC, hermeneutics was a part of philology, the study of ancient texts. It was a set of guideline for interpreting different classes of obscure texts.⁸ In the era of the Church Fathers, the Reformation, and early nineteenth century, hermeneutics was regularly defined as rules for the interpretation of Scripture.⁹

Hermeneutics today, however, becomes a critical reflection on the interpretive nature of all human experience. This significant change can be traced from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who suggested general hermeneutical procedures for interpreting all types of written texts. Grammatical and psychological interpretation is required to establish the meaning of words. Afterward, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) speaks of the need to try to step into the shoes of the author or dialogue-partner that one seeks to understand. He insists the importance of historical consciousness in reading texts. Furthermore, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) insists the importance of having a living relationship with the person or text that one seeks to understand. Similarly, Ernst Fuchs (1903-1983) contends that understanding in the fullest sense demands engagement and self-involvement.¹⁰

Hans-Georg Gadamaer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) explicate more fully the change mentioned above. Gadamaer suspects the validity of rationalism or mechanical method as a way of acquiring understanding and truth. He argues that understanding requires humility and openness toward the subject matter. It is the fusion of meaning horizons of interpreter and text that leads to a new event of understanding. While confirming that understanding requires a dialectical movement, Ricoeur recognizes the need of method or tools or analysis. It is this critical process that will reveal any

⁶ Although there are important debates raised by reformed figures such as Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder about the existence of common grace, this article assumes that common grace exists.

⁷ Anthony C Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 1.

⁸ Cf. Sally A. Brown, “Hermeneutics in Protestant Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Cathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 117.

⁹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6, 8; Brown, “Hermeneutics in Protestant,” 118.

distortions caused by political and social interests. For him, any text may yield multiple possible meanings, and an author's intended meaning cannot control the possible meanings of a text. Gadamer and Ricoeur commend pre-understanding as a more fruitful starting point for understanding. They believe interpretation is always open-ended and subject to revision, thus no absolute knowledge or truth.¹¹

Although hermeneutics continues to grow more complex so that it has become virtually impossible to cover or evaluate the entire terrain,¹² it can be classified into three different groups of theories regarding the locus and actualization of meaning: 1) Sender or author-centered group theory which concerns the origins and text production. It focuses on the world *behind* the text; 2) Message or text-centered group theory which concerns text preservation and mediation. Its emphasis is on the world *in* the text; 3) Receptor or reader-centered group which concerns the reception and interpretation of the text. It concerns on the world *in front of* the text.¹³

The changes mentioned above cause theologians, including those from a more evangelical circles, to propose a reconsideration in understanding and doing biblical hermeneutics. First, the hermeneutical process is not considered as linear anymore, but rather a spiral process.¹⁴ To get an understanding of the whole, one should comprehend the parts or pieces. At the same time, one cannot comprehend the meaning of individual pieces without having to some extent the understanding of the whole. Besides "parts-whole" meaning, this spiral process also has "pre-understanding-fuller understanding" meaning. Hence, one not only needs to move from pre-understanding to a fuller understanding but also needs to return back to check and to review the need for correction in his or her preliminary understanding.¹⁵ It implies that biblical hermeneutics can start not only from the biblical text. It can start from reader context or cultural context.

Spiral characteristic of hermeneutics also allows us to do Hermeneutics without being in the so-called neutral condition, that is, free from any preliminary understanding condition. One may start with his or own worldview or

¹¹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 2, 11–12; Brown, "Hermeneutics in Protestant," 119.

¹² Dirk Van der Merwe, "Reading the Bible in the 21st Century: Some Hermeneutical Principles: Part 1," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 1, 5. He lists another hermeneutical movements and figures such as Habermas's critical hermeneutics, Patte's structuralism, Derrida's deconstruction, Barth's dialectical theology and Cupepper and Moore's literary hermeneutics.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

¹⁴ Cf. Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 10.

¹⁵ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 14–15. Although "hermeneutical circle" has become part of standard technical terms in Hermeneutics as used by Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer, since it is an upward, constructive and responsible process, Thiselton rightly assesses "hermeneutical spiral" used by Grant Osborne as a more accurate term.

ideology. Hans Burger rightly says that it is a gift that cannot be transcended but must be used as optimally as possible. At the same time, one should evaluate critically evaluation to his or her position and willingness to learn from other position.¹⁶ Insisting the impossibility to have complete objectivity, Joel Green emphasizes that it is inevitable to begin from within one's life-worlds. In this spiral process, we are not to remove our own position, but to be aware that we are from that position and have an openness to any needed correction for further development.¹⁷

The second change is the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Scripture. Kevin Vanhoozer insists that the Bible should be read like any other book, and at the same time, every other book should be read like the Bible, within a Christian worldview. Therefore, for him, the Spirit of understanding must be the Holy Spirit and not the secular spirit.¹⁸ In doing hermeneutics, we need to be critical to ourselves. But we also need to have confidence, because the Holy Spirit works on us. He also emphasizes the importance of obeying the Scripture. The most profound kind of understanding has to do with the cultivation of the ability to follow the Word of God, not just in our reading but also in personal response to what we have read. Rather than merely knowing the Scripture, understanding also includes the ability to follow the Word.¹⁹ Furthermore, Green says that interpretation of biblical texts that does not lead to vital discipleship and mission hardly has a claim to being New Testament interpretation.²⁰ Although Green was writing in the context of studying New Testament, it is no exaggeration to say that it can be applied to the whole Scripture.

Thirdly, biblical hermeneutics should be accompanied by cultural exegesis. Developments in science and technology bring significant socio-cultural changes. Evaluating a cultural matter and thinking how to apply biblical principles in that area became more complicated. Hence, besides biblical exegesis, Vanhoozer encourages Christians to engage in cultural exegesis.²¹ Today significant church growing in Africa and Asia

¹⁶ Burger, *Being in Christ*, 11–13.

¹⁷ Joel B. Green, "The Practice of Reading the New Testament," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 415–16.

¹⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 209. See also Brown, "Hermeneutics in Protestant," 131. She says, "In the back-and-forth dance of interpretation, the Spirit moves. God draws us by the Spirit into deeper understanding of ourselves and each other as we continually interpret and reinterpret our past and present, reframed in the fathomless mercy of God."

¹⁹ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 228.

²⁰ Green, "Practice of Reading," 413.

²¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael Slesman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 35–37.

make us understand that it is hermeneutically incorrect to claim that one's interpretations are immune to cultural conditions and hence applicable to all times and places. Vanhoozer says that the twentieth-century revolution in hermeneutics makes the key methodological issue is no longer that of right procedure (how?) but location (where?) and position (who?).²² It is a turn to the social context, and it means "to *see* (analyze the social situation), *judge* (discern God's reign), and *act* (practice the politics of the kingdom of God)."²³

In a like manner, Paul Hiebert (1932-2007), a former professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Divinity School, proposes critical contextualization to deal with cultural matters. Originally it is a proposal for missionaries in mission field. It means one should neither reject nor accept old beliefs and customs without examination. Old beliefs and customs should be studied with regard to the meaning and places they have within their cultural setting and then evaluated in the light of biblical norms.²⁴ Through this process, we can get rid of the God-rebelling aspects without throwing the whole old customs. He argues that his method can be used to deal not only with old beliefs and customs in third world country but also the new cultural matters in developed countries.²⁵

Despite above-mentioned evangelical theologians' efforts, it seems that many from evangelical camps are still reluctant to welcome these hermeneutical changes.²⁶ *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth* provides examples of some Reformed evangelical theologians' concerns on how to face changes in hermeneutics.²⁷ Exploring Kuyper's common grace may give a new perspective in facing these changes.

II. Kuyper's Common Grace

The concept of common grace emerges as an endeavor to understand the fact of good things done by fallen humans. In fact, in many cases many non-Christians can do better than Christians. In Kuyper's word: "*the world*

²² Kevin J Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?": Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity," in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97. Emphasis original.

²⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 186-87.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 190-91. He provides an example of dealing with the hard rock music in Los Angeles.

²⁶ Anthony C Thiselton, "The Future of Biblical Interpretation and Responsible Plurality in Hermeneutics," in *The Future of Biblical Interpretation: Responsible Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 13.

²⁷ Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher, eds., *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014). Compared to Barend Kamphuis, Ad de Bruijne and Hans Burger, in my view, Jason Van Vliet, Arjan de Visser, Theodore Van Raalte, and Alan Strange were reluctant to adopt changes in hermeneutics.

turns out to be better than expected and the church worse than expected.”²⁸ For Kuyper, the answer is the existence of a common grace that refers to grace that neither leads to forgiveness of sin nor limited to God’s chosen people.²⁹ In the Scripture, although basically grace is associated with forgiveness of sin and human salvation, there is a kind of God’s grace that less related to forgiveness and salvation. For instance, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they did not die immediately. Although it meant neither forgiveness of sin nor salvation, it was God’s grace for Adam and Eve.³⁰ It “averted the lethal consequences of the curse and made possible and certain the continued, be it afflicted, existence of all that came from the original creation.”³¹ In *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper elaborates more the function of common grace as follows, “maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rest upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allow the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator.”³²

Kuyper distinguishes two operating areas of common grace. On the one hand, common grace works within the internal part of human being. On the other hand, it operates on the external dimension of human life. He explains:

The former is operative wherever civic virtue, a sense of domesticity, natural love, the practice of human virtue, the improvement of the public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty among people, and a feeling for piety leaven life. The latter is in evidence when human power over nature increases, when invention upon invention enriches life, when international communication is improved, the arts flourish, the sciences increase our understanding, the conveniences and joys of life multiply, all expressions of life become more vital and radiant, forms become more refined, and the general image of life becomes more winsome.³³

Although common grace can be called as the prominent concern of Kuyper’s life and works, Kuyper is far from neglecting the special grace. Indeed, he distinguishes common grace from special grace. However, he

²⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gift for A Fallen World, Volume 2: The Doctrinal Section [1903]*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and J. Daryl Charles, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Bellingham: Lexham, 2019), 10. Original emphasis.

²⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism [1898]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 52,123-124; Abraham Kuyper, “Common Grace [1902-1905],” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 168; Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gift for A Fallen World, Volume 1: The Historical Section [1902]*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015), 264.

³⁰ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 167; Kuyper, *Common Grace 1*, 263.

³¹ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 174; Kuyper, *Common Grace 2*, 698.

³² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 30.

³³ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 181; Kuyper, *Common Grace 1*, 539–40.

does not separate common grace totally independent from special grace. For Kuyper, same as the special grace, common grace is originating from the eternal Son of God. Jesus Christ is the root and the mediator of both special and common grace.³⁴ The two are related one another. Without common grace, Adam and Eve would die immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, and it would mean that no elect people could be born in this world. In other words, special grace assumes common grace. Activities that emerged from special grace such as preaching and mission need the broad ground from common grace in order to manifest itself on the temporal-visible side of those activities.³⁵ However, Kuyper does not stop here. He continues stating the common grace is “is only an emanation of special grace and that all its fruit flows into special grace.”³⁶ He asserts as follows:

Therefore, common grace must have formative impact on special grace and vice versa. All separation of the two must be vigorously opposed. Temporal and eternal life, our life in the world and our life in the church, religion and civil life, church and state, and so much more must go hand in hand. They may not be separated. To avoid such separation we must consistently make a sharp distinction between them, for it is on the correctness of this *distinction* that the progress of life depends.³⁷

Kuyper suggests making distinction of four terrains with regard to the relation between special and common grace: (1) of common grace without influence of special grace; (2) exclusive from special grace; (3) of common grace that is illumined by special grace; (4) special grace that has utilized the data of common grace. While places or countries that have not heard the gospel are the examples of the first terrain, institutional churches that avoid all usurpation represent the second terrain. Societies in Europe and North America in Kuyper’s time can be categorized as the third terrain because they received influence of biblical norms in their customs and laws. The fourth terrain can be found in Christians who allow their various life spheres such as art, school, press, and science to be controlled by the principles of the Bible.³⁸ In short, common grace prepares the way for special grace, then in turn, special grace exerts formative influence on common grace.

The concept of common grace leads to the understanding that God does not only care about church matters, but also outside church matters. The development of areas outside the church is also God’s will. He asserts:

³⁴ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 185–87; Kuyper, *Common Grace* 2, 725–26.

³⁵ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 169; Kuyper, *Common Grace* 1, 265.

³⁶ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 170–71; Kuyper, *Common Grace* 1, 267.

³⁷ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 185–86; Kuyper, *Common Grace* 2, 726.

³⁸ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 199–200; Kuyper, *Common Grace* 2, 772–73.

And for our relation to the world: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.³⁹

Development is God's will before the fall, and the fall was not changing it. God is not giving up in human cultural accomplishments in areas like arts, sports, education, business, politics, and entertainment. God could use non-Christians to do the development. Therefore, Christians should appreciate the development of things not directly related to the church, including the developments brought by non-Christians. It is common grace that make human can execute God's first command to have dominion over the creation as mentioned in Genesis 1:28.

Kuyper has a positive view of science. He explains that behind the God's creation, there is an operation of God's power and wisdom, which arranged by God's thought. Science emerged when human use the ability to think of God's thought in creation.⁴⁰ Kuyper says that science is God's instrument to release human from several consequences of sin. By using science, human develops and utilizes the hidden potencies of nature and human life. Through these process, human beings get greater power to conquer the nature and thus restore human rule over nature, which almost lost completely due to the fall.

Kuyper even thinks that the power from science is greater than Jesus' power. Because while Jesus' miracle were always on a single individual or a single crowd and restricted to a limited area, the scientific control over nature "affects and influences all nations and people equally, year after year, and constitutes a blessing to millions simultaneously in all their problems and diseases."⁴¹

It is also important to remember that common grace does not remove the effect of sin. Many people have weak logical capacity, constant mistakes in rationalizing, observation that deceived by outlook, slowness in reaching deep research; all these show that there is partial ruin in human science. Sin has made human lost the ability "to comprehend the true context, the proper coherence, the systematic unity of things."⁴² It made us cannot see God through nature as clear as Adam. But, God helps through common grace

³⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 31.

⁴⁰ Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, trans. Hans van de Hel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 442–45.

⁴¹ Abraham Kuyper, *You Can Do Greater Things than Christ: Demons, Miracles, Healing and Science*, trans. Jan H Boer (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1991), 34–34.

⁴² Kuyper, "Common Grace in Science," 449.

so that we can at least see something, although not as clear as Adam.⁴³

Furthermore, Kuyper sees that there are differences in sciences. Natural science can be accepted to a great extent. However, in history, philosophy and other social sciences, which deal with the matter of origin, relation and aim, the subjectivity of the researcher is decisive. There would be a vital difference between a regenerated researcher and unregenerated one. Here the common grace “now ceases to function as the basis for appreciating non-Christian conceptions and instead becomes the basis for antithetical action.”⁴⁴

For Kuyper, the conflict is not between faith and science, but between two faiths, namely Christian and non-Christian, which demand two sciences, that is Christian science and non-Christian science.⁴⁵ God’s regenerative work causes one humankind became two different humanities.⁴⁶ While unregenerated human sees everything as the normal condition, regenerated human see everything as an abnormal condition.⁴⁷ Although invisible, it is this different awareness that yields the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian science.⁴⁸ The antithesis is often not recognized. Especially in pure science, which only contains observation and activities such as weighs, measures, and calculations, regeneration would not affect any new things or changes. Although the process in between is the same, the starting and ending points are different.⁴⁹ Thus, Kuyper rejects that science is a neutral matter. Christian should develop its own concept in all human area.

This analysis leads to a calling for developing consistent and well-thought Christian worldview. Kuyper never denied achievements of non-Christians, yet he always sees the necessity for Christians to develop consistently according to Christian principles.⁵⁰

Kuyper writes that regeneration does not make Christians yield same science. Regeneration does not destroy the differences within individuals, nations and time process, either. Even science from the regenerated Christians also experiences friction and disputes.⁵¹ Disputes between regen-

⁴³ Ibid., 456.

⁴⁴ Jacob Klapwijk, “Antithesis and Common Grace,” in *On Kuyper: A Collection of Readings on the Life, Work & Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Steve Bishop and John H. Kok, trans. H. Donald Morton (Sioux Center: Dordt, 2013), 291–92.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 294. Cf. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 133.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tim McConnel, “Common Grace or Antithesis? Towards a Consistent Understanding of Kuyper’s” Sphere Sovereignty”, *Pro Rege* 31, no. 1 (2002): 4.

⁴⁷ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 137–38.

⁴⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles [1898]*, ed. Benjamin C. Richards, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (reformingscience.com, 2008), 109.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 111–16.

⁵⁰ McConnel, “Common Grace or Antithesis?,” 10.

⁵¹ Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 116, 119–20.

erated Christians happen not only in theology but also in all sciences.⁵² However, it is important to note that in pursuing cultural development, Kuyper and his followers seem to neglect this fact.⁵³

III. Utilizing Kuyper's Common Grace

Although Kuyper did not use common grace doctrine for hermeneutics in particular, we can derive at least four suggestions from common grace principles for facing hermeneutical changes. First, Christians are to appreciate the development in hermeneutics. Common grace doctrine reminds us that development is part of God's will revealed since the human creation. Therefore Christians are not to be afraid or avoid development in all areas of life, including hermeneutics. It would be easier to accommodate a hermeneutical development when one realized that every hermeneutical development is a part of God's grace to human. Although the theologians mentioned in the first section of this article propose a hermeneutic that different with the hitherto biblical hermeneutic, one would try to find positive points to be appreciated rather than simply refuse it. Moreover, since common grace is distributed to all people including non-Westerners and non-Christians, the doctrine of common grace encourages Christians to appreciate all development, even when the developments were accomplished or proposed by non-Western theologians or even by non-Christians philosophers. In the perspective of common grace, it is not a compromise, but a recognition of and gratitude for God's grace behind all development.

Second, at the same time, we are also to discern every hermeneutical change. While all development requires changes, not all change led to development. Therefore discerning every change is necessary. While commending science greatly, Kuyper also warns about the worldview of non-Christians that affecting them in doing science. For him, there is no neutral matter. Although the in-between process might be the same, the starting point and subsequently the ending point, of non-Christian science are different with Christian science. To see clearly these differences, one needs to delve into the worldview behind the proposed hermeneutics. Furthermore, since in reality, positive and negative effects are often intertwined each other,

⁵² Ibid., 127.

⁵³ Hans Burger, "A Soteriological Perspective on Our Understanding," in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*, ed. Mees te Velde and Gerhard H. Visscher (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 200, f.n. 15. He elaborates, "In his *Encyclopedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, Abraham Kuyper does consider sin and its epistemological questions. However, after the introduction of the *palingenesis* (regeneration), it seems as if all problems have disappeared. With a new foundation, a new building of Christian science can be constructed, no longer hindered by consequences of sin. Kuyper does not reflect on the ongoing effects of sin for Christian science."

discerning changes is indeed a very difficult task. Christians do need to practice Hiebert's "critical contextualization" mentioned in the first section.

It is also important to be critical of the changes brought by Christians. As pointed out by Hans Burger, Kuyper seems to neglect the ongoing effects of sin after the introduction of the regeneration.⁵⁴ Although Christians have already been generated, they still affected by sin and still can commit sins. Thus, changes brought by Christians do not always mean developments. The doctrine of common grace does teach that common grace relaxes the curse, but does not teach about the removal of the curse.

Third, Christians should attempt to develop hermeneutics. When liberal scholars challenged the traditional biblical hermeneutics, it seems that many evangelical scholars faced the challenge by attempting to master liberal scholarship merely to build ammunition against it.⁵⁵ When post-modernism comes into the arena, it seems that some evangelicals look toward postmodernism merely because it attacks the hegemony of scientific knowledge and the Enlightenment.⁵⁶ Although these efforts are much better than simple rejection and it might keep them from the possible dangers that are inherent in recent hermeneutics, it also keeps them from constructing significant developments in hermeneutics. Common grace doctrine can give more proper and stronger motivation for Christians to sincerely learn from hermeneutical changes and utilize them for developing hermeneutics. We are not to merely repeat our belief or confessions, but to develop it further. If Christians implement the critical appreciation, which is suggested in the first and second point of this section, this third point will be easier to do. We will hopefully find which elements that are appropriate, and which are not proper to be utilized in developing hermeneutics.

However, in pursuing development, one should be alert on the danger of pride as warned by Kuyper himself:

Often, or perhaps, usually, when the human spirit concentrates too much on cultural human development, the resulting science or art will encourage our ego, our selfishness, with such force that it becomes very difficult for the child of God in us not to be suppressed by our pride. ...For most people it would appear that their achievements in science or art give them such satisfaction and pride that it becomes impossible for them to humble themselves in the worship and service of God.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁵ Silva, "Case for Calvinistic Hermeneutics," 302.

⁵⁶ Thiselton, "Future of Biblical Interpretation," 26.

⁵⁷ Kuyper, *You Can Do*, 36.

Fourth, Christians also should have strong commitment to his faith in Jesus Christ. Although the emphasis of common grace is commonness between Christians and non-Christians, it is worth to remember that in Kuyper's common grace, Jesus Christ is not eliminated. Kuyper insists that Jesus Christ is the root and the mediator of common grace. While proposing common grace, Kuyper maintains that special grace paramount the common grace. Common grace prepares the way for special grace. Hence, Christians should have this principle in their minds when doing the development. They should make development in a Christian way. Christians should develop a God-glorifying hermeneutics. The doctrine of common grace should not be misused as a permission not to glorify Christ in the name of development. Although in reality, it is never an easy task to do, one thing that Christians can do for sure is having strong commitment to our faith in Jesus Christ as our starting and ending point of hermeneutic development. Christians also can emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit's work and transformative role of Bible reading as proposed by Vanhoozer and Green. Christians are allowed to, and should, develop Christian hermeneutics that brings benefits to Christians.

Since Kuyper seems to be interested in the epistemological matter than Jesus Christ himself, one has to be cautious in implementing this point. Hans Burger rightly warns this danger as follow:

However, in Kuyper's rectoral address, "The Biblical Criticism of the Present Day," we can detect traces of foundationalism. Here Kuyper clearly focuses on absolute, determined, certain knowledge. This focus is accompanied by a formal defense of the authority of Scripture. The content of the gospel of Jesus Christ itself does not play a role in Kuyper's argument.⁵⁸

We have to keep our track not to go back to epistemological foundationalism but to focus on Jesus Christ and the gospel as our starting and ending point.

To conclude, although Kuyper's common grace does not give any specific theory for hermeneutics in particular, it does give principles that can be a sort of framework on how we can deal with hermeneutical changes. Using those principles will make Christians to appreciate critically and use changes in hermeneutics as chances to further develop God-glorifying hermeneutics.

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⁵⁸ Burger, "A Soteriological Perspective," 197.

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