



The Idea of Rebirth in Dominionism and Abraham Kuyper's Neo-Calvinism: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the notion of “born-again” (*palingenesis*) in relation to “Christian fascism” found in far-right Christian movements. This research is urgent given the rising polarization between Christians' political left and right, which is drifting away from the ecumenical unity envisioned by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Through comparative qualitative content analysis, doctrinal analysis, and historical-theological study, this paper examines far-right Christian use of palingenesis to determine whether it emerged from Abraham Kuyper's work or developed later in the work of Dominionists like R.J. Rushdoony and Douglas Wilson. The existing literature tends to overlook a pivotal doctrinal shift: the subtraction of Common Grace transforms Kuyperian palingenesis from an inclusive, cosmic vision into an exclusionary, state-level 'fascist minimum.' There is also a notable lack of literature that directly addresses the “Moscow Model” (Douglas Wilson) and the relevant contemporary political landscape through a strictly comparative content analysis of the term palingenesis itself. Thus, in this study, six main distinctions between far-right Christian movements and Kuyper are suggested as a result of in-depth comparison.

Keywords: Christian Nationalism, Dominionism, Douglas Wilson, Fascism, Neo-Calvinism, Palingenesis

Article history

Submitted: March 4, 2026

Revised: August 20, 2026

Accepted: September 27, 2026

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How to cite this article:

Lima, J.S. & Skillen, J.W. (2026). The Idea of Rebirth in Dominionism and Abraham Kuyper's Neo-Calvinism: A Comparative Study. *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*. 10(2): 262-279. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v10i2.1158>

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of far-right political movements in many democratic societies has generated renewed scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and political extremism. The world's crisis today cannot be understood apart from the strong presence of the religious far-right in daily politics. In some countries, the trend reminds some of the rise of fascism before World War 2. The term "fascism" in this article is defined more widely as "various types of movements who reject universalism in favour of self-love and fear-of-the-other, usually done by idealization or mythologization of a "we" at the expense of the "they." (Camus & Lebourg, 2017). Ranging from QAnon militants (Frincu, 2021), Westboro Baptist Church armies (Lewis, 2025), to thousands of "212 protesters" against allegedly "religious blasphemy" by Ahok - the governor of Jakarta those days (Syahputra, 2020) - the religious and secular far-right narratives have some familial resemblance (Wodak, 2015). Not unlike fascism of the old days, the group's enemies include various kinds of socialists and other left-wingers, immigrants, and minority groups, which are seen as "impurities". So, what characterized far-right movements nowadays?

According to Kopeček (2007), a prominent Czech political scientist from Masaryk University, "the best working definition of the contemporary far-right may be the four-element combination of nationalism, xenophobia, law and order, and welfare chauvinism." Some characteristics shared by far-right groups may include narratives of a national "golden era," often imagined "when immigrants or other impure elements had not been present," beliefs of a current "decadence in society," apocalypticism (i.e., "the end is near"), beliefs in various conspiracy theories about some transnational cabal that really controls the world, robust boundary markers, fear or disgust about egalitarianism, and the hope of a "rebirth of the nation" in all its past glory (Griffin, 2006). Today's far-right movements often resemble the fascism of the early 20th century in the trading of nationalism, conspiracy theories, varieties of fear-mongering, and a longing for a lost "golden age."

For many Evangelical Christians, the far-right rhetoric of palingenesis is particularly persuasive because of some shared concerns such as perception of current moral decadence (e.g., issues around LGBTQ+, etc.), perceived hostility by "aliens" or "the other," and a heightened sense that "the end is near." By framing political battles as apocalyptic struggles against "cultural decadence" preceding Christ's second coming, these movements have convinced many believers to lend support to highly controversial policies such as the inhumane treatment of immigrants by ICE and toleration or even justification of the allegedly immoral and seemingly unchristian conduct of politicians that contradict the heart of the Gospel (Du Mez, 2020).

However, one must be aware that there are wide varieties in the far-right or Christian nationalism. As observed by Saiya (2025), these movements came from various origins and may have differing motifs, "... Christian nationalists, although presumably seeking the same goal—namely the establishment of a Christian nation—are a diverse lot, motivated by very different, in some cases mutually exclusive, belief systems." In this paper I will examine, among various other things, whether that the support some evangelical groups (e.g. "MAGA Evangelicals") give to these far-right movements might stem from a misunderstanding of this

idea of “rebirth.” According to Britannica MAGA movement is a “nativist political movement that emerged in the United States during the 2016 presidential campaign of its putative leader, Donald Trump. Its name is derived from Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan “Make America Great Again,” which has been a rallying cry for many Trump supporters ever since.” (Volle, 2026). To achieve this goal, I will compare the far-right’s vision of “Christian nationalism” with the political vision of Abraham Kuyper, prime minister of the Netherlands (1901-1905) and an influential Dutch Neo-Calvinist pastor, theologian, philosopher, and journalist.

METHOD

This paper employs a comparative qualitative content analysis (Ragin, 1989). Rather than a general survey, I will analyze the concept of palingenesis across two distinct bodies of literature using three specific criteria: Source, Scope, and Subject. I will examine representative texts from the “National Conservatism” movement and modern “Christian Nationalist” manifestos to find a coherent underlying thread by tracing its theological root to the work of far-right Christian movements led by people like R. J. Rushdoony, Douglas Wilson, and Stephen Wolfe in comparison to the Neo-Calvinist cultural-political vision of A. Kuyper and H. Dooyeweerd (2012b), focusing on their definitions of “palingenesis” and its connection to the idea of “Common Grace” and “antithesis.” Their essential work such as Rushdoony’s *Institute of Biblical Law* (Rushdoony, 1980), Wilson’s *Mere Christendom* (D. Wilson, 2023), Wolfe’s *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Wolfe, 2022), Abraham Kuyper’s *Common Grace* (Kuyper, 2015), *Lectures on Calvinism* (Kuyper, 2013), and Dooyeweerd’s (2012b) *Reformation and Scholasticism in Philosophy*.

By looking at how Kuyper and his followers understood the renewal of society vis-à-vis the idea of “national rebirth,” I aim to answer the research question: How do we discern the difference between a political myth of national rebirth and the true hope of the Gospel in our political calling as envisioned by A. Kuyper? To answer this question, I will ask three comparative questions about the source, scope, and subject. First, about the source of rebirth: “Does the Biblical text frame rebirth as a human cultural-political achievement or a divine sovereign act of cosmic or universal restoration?” Secondly, about the scope of rebirth: “Is the ‘new life’ limited to a specific group (e.g., national glory or ethnic glory), or does it apply to the entirety of creation (Gk. *apokatástasis*, i.e., the restoration and fulfillment of the whole creation to a condition of perfection)?” Third, about the subject of rebirth: “Is the goal to build a totalitarian Christendom or to liberate the various Social Spheres and give room for various religious convictions before Christ’s second coming?”

Current scholarship on political far-right movements, led by Roger Griffin (Griffin, 2006, 2008), identifies “palingenetic ultranationalism” as the mythic core of fascism. Historians have productively applied this framework to secular far-right movements (Constantin & Kallis, 2020; Gentile, 2006; Kallis, 2000). Although some political scientists treat the religious “born-again” language as a mere rhetorical flourish or a “veneer” for secular power-seeking, in this study, the language of “born-again” will be treated as a revealing factor. Before this analytical

lens can be extended to religious movements, however, a set of necessary conceptual distinctions must be established. Fascism (as an extreme revolutionary ultra-nationalist political ideology tied to early 20th century Italy in the time of Mussolini, Franco's Spain, and Nazi Germany), authoritarian populism (as a broader anti-liberal tendency within democratic systems), Christian nationalism (as a cultural-political framework asserting Christian primacy in national identity), Dominionism or Reconstructionism (as Rushdoony's specific program for applying biblical law to civil order) represent distinct analytical categories that are not interchangeable, even where they exhibit structural or rhetorical overlap. For instance, the author will deny the temptation of calling J. Rousas Rushdoony, Gary North (1987), Douglas Wilson, Stephen Wolfe, or "MAGA evangelicals" fascists.

Goldberg (2006) and Hedges (2008), who documented the rise of Dominionism and the influence of R.J. Rushdoony, argue that the language of palingenesis is actually deeper than mere rhetoric. They correctly identify the "kingdom of God" impulse of these movements, which centered on the idea of "rebirth." But a deep divide separates Rushdoony's Reconstructionism from Kuyper's "all of life redeemed." While the concept of palingenesis and God's kingdom, which promised to redeem and heal every inch of creation, applies to both Neo-Calvinism of Kuyper and the Reconstructionism of Rushdoony - hence these studies often inadvertently blame Kuyperian "sphere sovereignty" and "not a square inch" rhetoric for the "totalitarian" impulses of the modern far-right- the two camps may be divided by a deep chasm. For instance, Kuyper seems to commit to "principled pluralism" in society while the Dominionists tend to work toward a "Christian nation" or "Christendom" (Intan, 2022; Kuyper, 2013; Skillen, 1982, 2019; D. Wilson, 2023; Wolfe, 2022). However, this body of work often remains within internal theological debates. There is a notable lack of literature that directly compares Dominionists with Kuyper's political vision through a strictly comparative content analysis of the term palingenesis itself.

Thus, while we understand the political definition of palingenesis as a "fascist minimum" in Griffin's (2006) work and as a "radical and personal spiritual transformation" in Kuyper's, there is a critical gap of how to understand its function in the doctrinal mechanics of the Dominionist's point of departure from Kuyper. Specifically, existing literature has not sufficiently analyzed how the removal of the Doctrine of Common Grace transforms the Kuyperian "palingenesis" from an inclusive, cosmic hope into a "fascist minimum for state-level exclusion of "aliens." This essay attempts to fill that gap by examining far-right Christian nationalism through three criteria (Source, Scope, and Subject) to determine whether it is a legitimate product of Kuyper's vision or a fundamental subversion of it. The author anticipates that this study's findings will offer a novel contribution to scholarship on Dominionism, especially its intersections with far-right movements and Kuyper's thought.

RESULTS

In recent studies, the concept of palingenesis has been shown to have contributed to strong political and societal polarizations (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019). The concept has been used

by far-right groups to tighten in-group cohesion and to draw demarcations with rival groups - a pattern similar to what can be found in various types of fascism. Roger Griffin (2006), who coined the term “palingenetic ultranationalism,” situates the concept as “the core ideology” which embraces “a vast range of highly diverse concrete historical permutations [of fascist movements].” Palingenesis is a “fascist minimum” - i.e., the minimum conditions that a certain political movement must meet to be considered “fascist”. According to Griffin (2008), the core tenet of fascism is that it “mobilises energies of the masses through an elite to win cultural hegemony of new values and the total rebirth of the “ultranation,” whether conceived as a historic nation-state or as a race or ethnos, from what it defines as the present state of decadence.” The much-needed ingroup cohesion tends to multiply when one thinks other people simply do not and cannot see as one does because they have not been “born again.”

Palingenesis in Far-Right Christian Movements

This narrative of national palingenesis echoes a religious archetype of Eden-Fall-Redemption-Consummation - especially among Christian right-wing groups, e.g. the Dominionists or Theonomists. According to Goldberg (2006), the author of *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, Dominionism is “theocratic idea that regardless of theological view, means, or timetable, Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions.” The Dominionists “offer Jesus as the solution to all social ills.” Paul Rosenberg (2021), a senior editor for Random Lengths News and a columnist for Salon and Al Jazeera English, argued that the goal of far-right Christian movements is “about bringing government in all areas of life under biblical law, a continuation of the Mosaic law in the Old Testament, with some exceptions.” In short, the Dominionists narrative can be summarized as such: there was a time when everything was perfect in our beloved nation, but then evil lurks in (allegedly in the form of all those immigrants, pagans, atheists, leftists, and other aliens), followed by decadence, and now the time has come that the glorious mythical past will be reborn, a new order is coming.

A strong recent example of Dominionism is the rise of Douglas Wilson. Born in 1953 and raised primarily in Annapolis, Maryland, Douglas Wilson is a conservative Reformed theologian who founded the influential “Moscow Model” of Christian institutional building in Idaho. After serving in the U.S. Navy submarine service, he moved to Moscow, Idaho, to attend the University of Idaho, where he earned degrees in Philosophy and Classical Studies before assuming leadership of what became Christ Church in 1977. Originally influenced by the charismatic Jesus People movement, Wilson transitioned to a strictly Calvinist and Presbyterian framework in the late 1980s, eventually co-founding the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and establishing a network of institutions including Logos School, New Saint Andrews College, and the publishing house Canon Press. Wilson (2023) is a central figure in the Christian Nationalist movement, using his “theocratic libertarian philosophy” to advocate for a society governed by biblical law and traditional patriarchy. Wilson’s rise to national political prominence is exemplified by his ties to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, a member of

his church who has integrated Wilson's dominionist theology into the Pentagon's official culture. This influence was most visible during a February 2026 Pentagon prayer service, where Wilson delivered a sermon on his "All of Christ for All of Life" vision, praying for a "black swan revival" to bring the U.S. government under Christian authority (Ward, 2025). As a *kirker* himself, Hegseth has championed Wilson's patriarchal views and "theocratic libertarian" framework—including his skepticism of women in combat and the repeal of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibits the federal government and states from denying U.S. citizens the right to vote on the basis of sex. As CNN documents, Wilson's mentorship of Hegseth represents the successful migration of Christian Reconstructionist ideas from the theological fringe into the center of American military and executive power (Brown et al., 2025).

This symbiosis between militaristic, hierarchical, and totalitarian state-leadership with far-right Christian movements can be explained by their theology, specifically its eschatology. For the Dominionists, the coming apocalypse will face a strong resistance from the alleged evil status quo, hence the call for a holy war for those who believe in this narrative. According to Chris Hedges (2008), "this new ideology gives the believers a cause, a sense of purpose, meaning, feelings of superiority, and a way to justify and sanctify their hatreds." The Dominionists picture themselves as a tiny minority who stand and fight against the Goliath of pagan humanism, and finally will prevail. As R. J. Rushdoony (1980), the grandfather of Dominionism and a major influence on Douglas Wilson, argued, "History has never been dominated by majorities, but only by dedicated minorities who stand unconditionally on their faith." Rushdoony believes these tiny true believers will dominate society and lead it to glory because they believe in the true law, they see the evil of present [secular] law, and with God on their side, they will fight to victory. Rushdoony (1980, p. 4) stated that "in any culture, the source of law is the god of that society." Hence, the origin of European problems, according to Rushdoony, is that back in the Middle Ages, they began to replace the sovereignty of God's law with whatever the king saw fit. He said, "In every religious faith, in every religion, in every culture, the God of that system provides the laws [...] if you allow any other law to come in you are acknowledging another God" (Rushdoony, 1980). "Every society is theocratic," Wilson said in an interview with CNN at his premises (Ward, 2025), "The only question is who's 'Theo'? In Saudi Arabia, Theo is Allah. In a secular democracy, it would be Demos, the people. In a Christian republic, it'd be Christ." In Mere Christendom, Wilson argues that worship is at the heart of every civilization. He wrote, "No culture without *cultus*. A culture is religion externalized, and thus it makes sense to ask of every culture what form of worship lies at the center of it." Furthermore, in his blogs Wilson advocates for a strict patriarchal social order that includes banning women from church leadership, criminalizing homosexuality and abortion, and supporting the repeal of the 19th Amendment (D. Wilson, 2026). This explains why Dominionists like Wilson and their more extreme branches like Westboro Baptist Church are also obsessed with law and lawmaking (Barrett-Fox, 2010). It seems like they attempt to fulfill God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" via legislation and nation-building. Hence, there is a

totalitarian aspiration to their vision of cultural and political engagement. Although Wilson refused to be called a “White nationalist,” “fascist,” “racist,” or “misogynist,” he does not refuse to be called a “Christian nationalist” (Brown et al., 2025).

Not unlike fascism, the far-right Christians' aim is “all of life redeemed.” One can find a secular variant of it in Mussolini's (1935) *Doctrine of Fascism*:

Fascism, in short, is not only a law-giver and a founder of institutions, but an educator and a promoter of spiritual life. It aims at refashioning not only the forms of life but their content — man, his character, and his faith. To achieve this purpose, it enforces discipline and uses authority, entering into the soul and ruling with undisputed sway. Therefore, it has chosen as its emblem the Lictor's rods, the symbol of unity, strength, and justice.

Compare that to the Dominionists' agenda reflected in D. James Kennedy's¹ remarks, as reported by Chris Hedges (2008):

Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost,” Kennedy has said. 'As the vice regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors- in short, over every aspect and institution of human society.

If a Kuyperian experiences *déjà vu* upon hearing Rousas John Rushdoony's mandate for “all areas of life under [God's] law” or Douglas Wilson's “all of Christ for all of life,” it is because Rushdoony—Wilson's spiritual father—shared a deep intellectual affinity with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. John Rushdoony wrote prefaces for the English edition of Dooyeweerd's books, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Dooyeweerd, 2012a) and *The Christian Idea of the State* (Dooyeweerd, 1968). Both Rushdoony and North leaned heavily on Kuyper and Van Til's idea of “antithesis” between Christian and non-Christian cultures. Kuyper is of course famously saying, “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!” In fact, House (2008) from Chalcedon.edu, one of the “think tanks” of Rushdoony's Dominionist movement, named Dooyeweerd and Rushdoony as the two giants who stand on Kuyper's shoulders. Now, let us turn to Kuyper and his idea of palingenesis to see whether this claim is justified.

Palingenesis in Kuyper

The concept of palingenesis is one of the most fundamental building blocks in Kuyper's work. It is related to the concept of “antithesis” between Biblical v. apostate life-systems (Dooyeweerd, 2012b, pp. 3–6). Those who have been born again see the world differently than before, value it differently, see themselves and their fellows differently, and relate to all of these in a radically different way, i.e., the way of a “born-again Christian,” so that they will bear fruit for God's kingdom. The concept of palingenesis is mainly used to point to a “deeply personal and Christian-communal experience of Christ's redeeming love by the power of the Holy

¹ D. James Kennedy was a prominent right-wing American Presbyterian pastor, author, and televangelist known for founding the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the international evangelism training program, Evangelism Explosion.

Spirit.” The phrase is used as a metaphor from the natural birth of a baby. It points back to the radicality of Christian personal-communal experience of leaving sin and evil, embracing the good.

In his poetic imagery, Kuyper (2013) conceived life and worldview as a plant and its root:

As truly as every plant has a root, so truly does a principle hide under every manifestation of life. These principles are interconnected, and have their common root in a fundamental principle; and from the latter is developed logically and systematically the whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions that go to make up our life and world-view. With such a coherent world and life-view, firmly resting on its principle and self-consistent in its splendid structure, Modernism now confronts Christianity; and against this deadly danger, ye, Christians cannot successfully defend your sanctuary, but by placing in opposition to all this, a life and worldview of your own, founded as firmly on the base of your own principle, wrought out with the same clearness and glittering in an equally logical consistency.

The said “hidden principle” or the “root” of cultures here is the spirit which gives birth to its worldview, philosophy, science, institutions, and other fruits of culture, which Kuyper then challenged Christians to produce, consistent to their own root. The root of a Christian life here is of course, the radically changed heart - i.e. palingenesis done by the Spirit of God, which enabled us to be united to Christ Jesus. Kuyper accepts palingenesis as “the new principle for life, even for reformational Christian science” and “on this basis he proclaimed that there is a radical antithesis in starting point between Christian and non-Christian science” (Dooyeweerd, 2012b).

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that this is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God’s holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which the Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.

It is interesting to note that, according to Dooyeweerd (2012b, p. 5), some theologians proposed to *exclude* palingenesis as the basic religious notion of Reformed science because “it is not open to inspection by one’s fellow human beings” (i.e. can be just “subjective”) and proposing “Scripture alone” as the sole basis of Reformed science. Dooyeweerd (2012b) rejected this proposal for the following reason: “Scripture is only accessible through the operation of the Holy Spirit.” We cannot exclude the subjectivity and particular standpoint of the reader in the process of reading a text. Indeed, because a lack of palingenesis renders the Scriptures ‘inaccessible’ in their fullness to unbelievers, Dooyeweerd argues that both palingenesis and the antithesis must remain central to the Neo-Calvinist tradition.

Comparison

At a glance, far-right Christians’ conception of palingenesis is quite similar to Kuyper, i.e. in his usage of *palingenesis* and emphasis of antithesis between Christian and non-Christian

life-systems, which branched from two opposite heart-directions. But there are at least six important distinctions that should be noticed.

First, Kuyper balanced his emphasis on palingenesis and antithesis with another idea: common grace. However, the far-right movements that critics associate with Neo-Calvinist influence, relate to the doctrine of common grace in ways that are structurally divergent from Kuyper's own framework, and in some cases, directly antithetical to it. Two trajectories can be identified. The first, visible in contemporary Christian Nationalism suggested by Wolfe (2022), appropriates common grace but “nationalizes” it: God's providential ordering of humanity into distinct peoples and civilizations is read as conferring normative weight on the preservation of a particular Christian cultural order, effectively transforming a universally-directed divine provision into a mandate for civilizational (and implicitly ethnic) particularity. Common grace here no longer creates space for genuine collaboration across the antithesis; it becomes instead a theological warrant for cultural dominance. The second trajectory, found in Reconstructionism, moves in the opposite direction entirely. North (1987), Rushdoony's most systematic successor, explicitly rejected Kuyper's doctrine of common grace as dangerously accommodationist, arguing in *Dominion and Common Grace* that it conceded too much epistemic and cultural legitimacy to autonomous human culture and thereby undermined the totalizing demand of the antithesis. For Reconstructionism, the proper response to the cultural mandate is not collaboration across a divinely graced common sphere but the comprehensive reordering of every sphere under biblical law. The significance of this divergence for the present study is considerable: those far-right movements that invoke Kuyper's cultural engagement rhetoric have typically either distorted or abandoned the precise doctrinal mechanism — common grace — that in Kuyper's own architecture limits the antithesis, checks totalizing impulses, and grounds a genuinely pluralist rather than theocratic public theology.

Kuyper arguably inherited and expanded the idea of common grace from John Calvin. In his *Institutes*, Calvin (1960, II. 2. 15) argues that in secular writers' work, we can find evidence that “the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts.” These gifts, said Calvin, came from God's Spirit as the “sole fountainhead of truth itself.” Interestingly enough, Calvin's high appraisals on the work of the pagan writers are situated in a chapter which has a title that reads: “Man has now been deprived of freedom of choice and bound over to miserable servitude.” Both Calvin and Kuyper were not deficient in awareness of the radicality of sin, but they also, especially Kuyper, did not lose sight of the sovereignty of God's common grace. Further, Kuyper argues that, “deficient development of the doctrine of common grace” produces damages in the Reformed paradigm (Kuyper, 2015, p. 3).

Second, unlike the Dominionist's overbearing emphasis on antithesis at the expense of commonality between Christian and non-Christian, with his balanced use of antithesis and common grace, in his program Kuyper can avoid “politicization of the gospel” on the one hand and “siege mentality” on the other (Mouw, 2011). This does not mean that Kuyper failed to see the political implications of the Gospel. It means Kuyper does not begin with a political or

cultural “blueprint” then try to find justification for it from the Bible. He did not try too hard to force his system to his exegesis.

Third, Kuyper admits the presence of “commonality” between the trees of believers and unbeliever, namely, one can find good and evil in both people. On the one hand, goodness in a non-Christian culture, e.g. wisdom in the work of Plato and “virtues of the heathens,” and on the other hand evil in a Christian culture, e.g. the massacre in St. Bartholomew’s Day, cruelties of Spanish army against Dutch civilians, etc, (Kuyper, 2013, pp. 121–125). In general, being born again Christian does not automatically and promptly produce good Christian philosophy, theology, arts, science, and life. Paligenesis also does not guarantee that whatever we do or aspire presently is surely done “for the Lord” (*pro Rege*). As has been observed by David VanDrunen (2010):

Kuyper identifies a variety of factors that explain the presence of commonness in the sciences: regeneration does not immediately work itself out among believers, regeneration does not immediately impel toward scientific investigation, and unbelievers have made use of special revelation through much of history.

Kuyper supports his teaching on this “commonality” with lengthy biblical arguments, which cannot be listed comprehensively in this article. I will give just one example. In the chapter, “Tempering of Sin” in his *Common Grace*, vol. 2, Kuyper gives an example from the biblical story of the encounter between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 20:6). God himself had restrained Abimelech from committing the sin of adultery with Sarah. Abimelech was not God’s people, but in that incident, Kuyper argues, God himself “directly worked” upon him so that he was not committing adultery with Sarah. On the other hand, Kuyper also admits that this is distinct from the way God works among His people. He wrote, “... it plainly appears that common grace did not proceed ethically.” This means that “the restraining was not the result of better or more pious thoughts that God awakened in Abimelech, as for instance with Joseph, when Potiphar’s wife sought to seduce him” (Kuyper, 2015).

Contrary to Kuyper, the far-right highlighted the antithesis between believers and unbelievers to the point of rejecting any commonality between them. Both far-right movements that sprang from Rushdoony’s Dominionism (e.g., David Wilson) and the Two Kingdoms branch (e.g., Stephen Wolfe) emphasized this “uncommonality.” Wolfe (2022), for instance, started his argument from uniqueness of nations and cultures. He wrote, “the idea that people in the same place and culture should live together and seek one another’s good.” He argues that, “The grace of the gospel does not eliminate our geography, our people, and our neighbors. Instead, it restores us to pursue local needs and local leadership freely and without apology.”

Fourth, unlike in the Dominionist circles, in Kuyper and perhaps for the rest of Christianity outside far-right circles, palingenesis was not used as a boundary marker, at least not that strong. On the contrary, palingenesis explains how God changed haters of God into lovers of God and men across borders. In far-right Christian circles, it acts as a “*Shibboleth* test” to separate “the sheep” from “the goats.” In the New Testament, palingenesis was understood as a “radical transformation from the inside out,” so radical that Christian writers

use metaphors like “born anew”, “renewed human being”, “resurrected spiritually from death”, or being “freed from bondage”. For example, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus uses the term when He explains to Nicodemus how one can see the coming of God’s kingdom (John 3:3, 5). Jesus did not use the term to exclude those who cannot see the kingdom; rather, He invites Nicodemus to believe that the kingdom has indeed come. This is apparently evident in the way John pictured Nicodemus afterwards as those among the Pharisee and Scribes who sympathize or even belong to “Jesus crowd” (see John 7:50-51 and 19:39). The term here is used to explain why some people tend to reject the Gospel and some tend to receive it with gratitude, not to demonize those who reject the Gospel or demarcate the identity of Christians.

The far-right Christian's failure to admit some goodness and God’s work among unbelievers may be a consequence of the strong demarcation between “us” (who have been born again) and “them” (who have not been born again). This strong demarcation tends to shape an unchristian political vision where, as elite citizens, Christians will enjoy political privilege over their non-Christian fellow citizens. This is contrary to God’s command to love others (even our enemies) as ourselves.

As the reader can see, I am not trying to undermine the reality of palingenesis in creating radically new human beings. My aim is simply to show that nationwide “Christian gate-keeping” runs counter to the Gospel. As Skillen (1982, Chapter 5, p. 2) warned, “Christians must not try to establish an earthly state or political community that would be for Christians only, or that would be fully open only to those who confess Christian faith.” To support his point, Skillen refers to the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30). Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. Good seed was sown in a field and later an enemy came and sowed tares (or weeds) in that field. Caretakers went to their master and asked if he wanted them to pull up the tares, but the owner said No, they must be allowed to grow up together lest the wheat be damaged. At harvest time, the wheat and the tares can be separated, the weeds burned and the wheat gathered into the storehouse. When Jesus explained this parable (Matt. 13:36-43), one of his main points was that humans are not responsible for separating “children of the evil one” from “the children of the kingdom” before the final harvest. On the judgment day, not these days, the angels sent by the Lord will conduct the harvest. In the meantime, the children of the kingdom (wheat) and the children of the evil one (weeds) are to grow up together in the field of God’s kingdom. One can understand from this parable and Jesus’ explanation of it that God does not commission Christians to try to use public law to force out non-Christians from society.

Fifth, the usage of palingenesis in far-right Christian circles implied an eschatology of total annihilation of everything that did not belong to “us” in this present age but in the work of Kuyper and his Neo-Calvinist followers everything good will be cleansed and incorporated into the coming glory (Hochschild, 2017; Kristanto, 2020; Middleton, 2018; Wolters, 2005). But how would we then explain the imagery of eschaton in the Book of Revelation where “they shall bring the glory and honour of the [pagan] nations into it” (Rev. 21: 24-26)? In a remark about the eschaton Skillen (1982, p. 67) said, “Nothing that is positively constructive in human

experience throughout the history of our sixth-day generations will be lost.” In the end, as always, He shines in all that’s fair.

Finally, in Kuyper, the emphasis was not that “God hates” those who are not born again as in the most extreme far-right group, but that God so loves the world that He created so that He redeemed it and invites the believers to participate in the new way of being which has been opened up by the coming of God’s kingdom in Jesus Christ. God who loves the world so much commands us to love it too, not so that we become like it, but so that his Good News can shine its light unhindered, as far as curse is found.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis reveals that while far-right Christian groups adopt the Kuyperian language of “palingenesis” (spiritual rebirth) and “antithesis,” they fundamentally alter its application. The comparative study identifies that these groups weaponize these concepts to create a rigid, exclusionary political identity, stripping away the mitigating doctrines of common grace and historical continuity that were central to the original Reformed tradition.

These findings suggest a significant departure from traditional Neo-Calvinism. Where Kuyper balanced the antithesis of obedience and disobedience to God, on one hand, and God’s blessing of common grace on everyone, on the other hand, he was acknowledging that all humans, including Christians are sinners and that non-Christians are able, by God’s common grace, to contribute many good things to our common life. From Kuyper’s point of view, those who refuse to accept the Calvinist recognition of “God’s excellent gifts” exhibited in all people (Calvin, 1960), fall into what Kuyper warned against, namely a “siege mentality” and “the politicization of the gospel (Mouw, 2011).

In comparing the idea of rebirth in Kuyper’s work v. the Dominionists, via three loci of comparison, the author found them significantly different.

First, about the source of rebirth, the author found that in the New Testament and the early church writings, salvation is always initiated and ushered in by God - even when human beings were resisting it (Lima 2020, p. 9). For instance, in the book of Daniel 2:44 we see that in the prophecy about the coming kingdom of God, it is God himself who establishes His kingdom - not man. In Daniel 7:13-14, God establishes his rule by the work of “The Son of Man,” a mysterious figure that Christians believe as referring to Jesus, who is given power, authority, and honour over all nations. Hence, Christians believe that indeed God rules over nations by His chosen one, but this chosen one is Jesus Christ, not Charlemagne, Napoleon, or Donald Trump. Certainly, all God’s children are invited and empowered to participate in the new order of God’s kingdom (e.g. Mat. 21:43, Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), but in that kingdom, it is God who is in charge and acts as the sole source of renewal. Human beings and movements are *never in charge* of the timing or final authority in the kingdom - in fact they are often resisting it. On the contrary, for Rushdoony, the kingdom does not come *to* human reconstruction; it comes *through* it. For instance, the “stone,” in his preteristic reading of Daniel 2: 35, 44, becomes the faithful implementation of biblical law by covenant communities

(Rushdoony, 1980, 2012, 2023). In line with Rushdoony, Douglas Wilson (2023) also treats human agency as the necessary condition for Christendom's advance. For instance, regarding purification of the church, he wrote in *Mere Christendom*, "We cannot pray for the purification of the silver, and then despair when we begin to approach the furnace that removes the dross. The Church in America is shot through with corruptions. If we want that corruption removed, then we must also want God's appointed instruments for removing it" (D. Wilson, 2023). But, to be fair with Wilson, he too does not equate the United States of America with God's kingdom, although he apparently hopes that the state will keep idolaters out of the gate. For instance, equating the American Leftish movements with the invasion of Rome by the Goths and Vandals, he wrote, "Third, centuries ago Augustine wrote his great work *The City of God*. He did this because Rome had been sacked by Bernie supporters, and many Christians who had too glibly equated Rome with the kingdom of God needed some encouragement. The United States of America, as it was in the times of the good Dwight Eisenhower, is not the same thing as the kingdom of God. The disappearance of the former is not the same thing as the disappearance of the latter. The kingdom of God is doing very well. The America I grew up in, not so much. Idolaters are always discouraged when the idol falls, but Christians serve the living God of Heaven (D. Wilson, 2023).

Second, about the scope of rebirth the author found that the New Testament always pictured God's kingdom as inclusive and universal. As Wolters' (2005) put it, "The scope of redemption is as great as that of the fall; it embraces creation as a whole." This does not imply universalism in a sense that "God saves those who relentlessly reject salvation by Jesus to the end." Rather, it means that God will not "destroy the world together with the wicked" (cf. Gen. 18: 23). Universality of salvation means God invites all people into the kingdom, beginning with those who are poor, persecuted, and marginalized (Cf. Mat. 5: 3-12), those "who are far away" i.e. the Gentiles who were the enemies of God's people (cf. Eph. 2: 17 and 3: 6). Jesus even said that those people will receive the kingdom first (cf. Matt. 19: 30). This stands in contrast to the way far-right employment of palingenesis as a political shibboleth or a marker of national identity. The use of palingenesis as a boundary-marker potentially transforms a spiritual doctrine into a tool for civic discrimination. It differs sharply with Kuyperian political vision, where Christians must not seek an "earthly state... for Christians only" (Skillen, 1982). The Dominionists seem to give the impression that palingenetic dominion means carrying out vengeance and final judgment now, immediately, before Christ's second coming, faithful Christians must "separate the wheat from the tares." In fact, that is exactly what Jesus condemned in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; Romans 12-13; and Luke 22:24-30). The Dominionists in this regard seem to act and write as if Jesus never taught anything and that the New Testament was never written.

Third, about the subject of rebirth the author found that, as opposed to the political vision of the Dominionists, the New Testament, as interpreted by A. Kuyper (2013) and Dooyeweerd (2012b), never intended to build a politically authoritarian Christendom either by military or economic domination. The Dominionists often interpret the "dominion mandate" of

Genesis 1 as a license for authoritarian power. In contrast, the original language and its subsequent biblical usage point toward stewardly management and development as servants of God. Throughout the Old Testament—particularly in the Prophets—God consistently condemns authoritarian rule that marginalizes the poor, destroys the environment, or mistreats the sojourner (cf. Lev. 25; Deut. 15; Deut. 24:10–22). Rushdoony (1980) and Wilson (2013) advocate a libertarian economic framework that stands in tension with the Old Testament’s redistributive mandates. Their model often bypasses the socio-economic safeguards of the Torah, such as the septennial release of debts, the Jubilee return of ancestral land, and the gleaning laws designed for the marginalized (cf. Lev. 25; Deut. 15). They also, using Kuyperian terms, ignore the differentiation of society into various social spheres even within the Israelites’ kingdom era. For instance, the king in Israel should not have all authority over society; prophets and priests had their own God-given authority (consider the story of Saul leading a sacrifice because he was impatient to get on with the battle and did not wait for the priest to arrive (1 Samuel 13:5-15)). One may also notice how even the wicked King Ahab, frustrated by Naboth’s refusal to sell his vineyard, did not just resort to military takeover, instead his Queen Jezebel resorted to a more complex Machiavellian move by framing Naboth “legally” out of his own land (1 Ki. 21, Cf. Lev. 25). If Ahab indeed had a totalitarian authority over all Israel the land take over could be much simpler. While Rushdoony (1980) and Wilson (2013), somewhat influenced by Kuyper’s idea of Sphere-Sovereignty, which gives Rushdoony’s argument for his anti-statism and Wilson’s justification for his refusal to the idea of public schooling, their versions often result in a “Libertarian void” where the references to Torah’s social safety nets (cf. the gleaning laws and debt release) curiously disappear. Their focus on the autonomy of the family sphere economic libertarianism both tend to prioritize private property over the communal economic obligations commanded in the Torah and Prophets.

The primary strength of this study lies in its qualitative content analysis, which allowed for a systematic comparison between historical Reformed texts (Kuyper and Calvin) and modern far-right manifestos. By using a comparative framework, the study was able to pinpoint exactly where theological concepts were stripped of their nuance—specifically, the removal of “common grace” from the “antithesis” narrative. This method provides a clear doctrinal audit, showing that the far-right’s “palingenesis” by Rushdoony and Wilson is not a direct continuation of Kuyperian thought, but a selective appropriation of it.

However, there are limitations to consider. First, while content analysis is effective for identifying rhetorical patterns, it cannot measure the internalized beliefs of the followers within these movements; we can see what the leaders speak and write, but not necessarily how “the pews” interpret it. Second, the sample size of far-right texts was limited to right-wing Western Evangelical Calvinists such as R. J. Rushdoony and Wilson, which may not represent the full diversity of global far-right Christianity. Finally, the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis means that while the categories are grounded in the text, their interpretations remain subject to the researcher’s theological bias, which is Kuyperian Neo-Calvinistic.

The findings have serious implications for contemporary pluralism. The far-right's failure to recognize "commonness" between believers and unbelievers leads directly to a political vision where Christians claim elite status over fellow citizens. My practical suggestion is that Evangelical Christians, in our political and cultural engagement, should balance the concern about "being faithfully different from the world" (antithesis) with the doctrine of common grace to counter the premature "wheat-burning mentality" identified in this study. As has been warned prophetically by Solzhenitsyn (2018) the attempt to separate "the wheats" from "the tares" is often problematic. He famously said in *Gulag Archipelago*, "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Lastly, future researchers for this topic may investigate the possibilities, such as whether this "strong demarcation" is indeed a result of intentional theological shift or just a byproduct of modern political polarization.

CONCLUSION

The reality of palingenesis cannot be factored out of Christian life without altering one of the core teachings of the New Testament, but we need to distinguish the "far-right" use of the term (somehow rooted in a corrupted version of biblical Christianity) with the way Kuyper used it. Surely, Christ's disciples will always be like "sheep sent among wolves" but they are also called to be peacemakers - those who build bridges, as an act of love towards their enemies and bring about shalom in this fallen-yet-redeemed world. They are not called to build Christ's kingdom with the ethos of John Wayne. Christians are called to participate in God's kingdom building by following Jesus in the way of sacrificial love toward the other. Christians should abandon attempts to gain dominance "for the glory of God" in society through political, economic, cultural, or other programs in the name of God's Kingdom.

Competing interests

The author has no competing interests in writing this article.

Author contributions

J.S.L. conceptualized and designed the study, acquired reading materials, drafted the manuscript, presented it in the Junior Scholars Workshop (JSW) of the Reformational Philosophy Conference 2021 (Dec 11, 13.30-15.00 UTC), and finalized the paper in the submitted form. J.W.S. participated in the initial reading and consultation of the first draft in 2021 and its final draft in 2026.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects. This is a literature study.

Funding information

The research is self-funded.

Data availability

Whenever used in this article, the data was gathered by search engines from reputable journals and other written sources.

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