

UNIVERSITY  
SERIES  
Historical  
Studies

THE  
CHRISTIAN  
IDEA  
of the  
STATE

CRAIG  
PRESS

HERMAN DOOYEWEERD

THE CHRISTIAN IDEA  
of  
THE STATE

By

DR. HERMAN DOOYEWEERD

Translated By  
JOHN KRAAY

Original Published By  
THE CRAIG PRESS  
Nutley, New Jersey  
1968

Republished in *Essays in Legal, Social, and Political Philosophy*. Ed. by Alan M. Cameron et al.  
*The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd*, Series B, Volume 2 (1997), pp. 121–55.

Reprinted in *Political Philosophy*. Ed. by Daniël Strauss. *The Collected Works of Herman Dooyeweerd*,  
Series D, Volume 1 (2004), pp. 17–47.

UNIVERSITY SERIES, *Historical Studies*

Rouas J. Rushdoony, *Editor*

[Square brackets denote the Craig Press (1968 edition) pagination]

**This edition is for personal study use only**

## THE AUTHOR

Dr Herman Dooyeweerd has been professor of the Philosophy of Law in the Free University of Amsterdam since 1926. The author of many works in the fields of philosophy and jurisprudence, he has in addition held many posts of a public nature in the Netherlands.

For many years he was executive secretary of the Abraham Kuyper Foundation at the Hague, and as such established its quarterly, *Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. During 1959 he lectured extensively in the United States and Canada under the auspices of the Reformed Fellowship.

In the philosophical circles he is best known for his four volume *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company) which deals with the new school of Christian philosophy of which Dr. Dooyeweerd is the founder. Also in English is his *In The Twilight of Western Thought* (University Series: *Philosophical Studies*.)



## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Dr Herman Dooyeweerd's lecture "De Christelijke Staatsidee." was addressed to ARJA (Apeldoorn, 1936), a youth movement of one of the two largest Christian political parties in the Netherlands, the *Antirevolutionaire Partij*. The lecture was subsequently published in expanded form by Libertas, Rotterdam 1936.

The lecture was given at a time when references to Facism and National-Socialism were actual, timely, and prophetic. In a different way they still are – and I have retained them. Specific references to Dutch historical events however, have been omitted. Dr. Dooyeweerd was not concerned with platform-program of action for a given Christian political party, but rather with a Scripturally directed view of the state in general. As such then, this little gem is not limited to pre-World War II events or Dutch culture, but is a principal springboard for Christian political thought at any time.

Professor ·Dr: H. Evan Runner, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, and an influential figure in the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (Toronto) , encouraged me to translate this little book, and a group of students sponsored by him, the Groen Van Prinsterer Society, was kind enough to arrange for publication with Craig Press. Dr. Bernard Zylstra, who will shortly join the Institute of the Association for the Advancement of Christian

[vi] Scholarship to work in the area of jurisprudence, suggested numerous improvements in translation which were gratefully adopted.

May this little book contribute to a re-awakening of Christian political action on this continent, toward the alleviation of the many pressing political problems. May it inspire the recognition of our communal Christian political task, spur us on to look toward to the Kingdom of Righteousness and in obedient service of God to confront the world with the liberating power of Christ.

September 1, 1967

*John Kraay*\*

[vi]

---

\* Mr. Kraay is a graduate of Calvin College, where he majored in philosophy. He is currently a graduate student of philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam.

## INTRODUCTION

[vii] The mythology of an age so dominates the mind and culture of man that his thought and action find expression within the mythology framework. Fallen man relates himself more readily to his culture myths than to reality. Any approach to a discussion of the Christian idea of the state runs therefore counter to the spirit of the age and the accepted frameworks of thought and action.

In order to analyze the concept of *the state* it is advisable as a result to recognize certain premises which are either concealed in popular thought or improperly apprehended.

*First* of all, it is necessary to recognize that, throughout most of history, the state has been *the* religious order of man and the central vehicle of his religious life, and this is no less true today than in ancient Greece. We are accustomed to thinking of the church as the religious institution, and the state as simply the political ordering of man's life, but such thinking is at the very least erroneous and certainly guilty of accepting the framework of the myth. The ancient *polis*, city-state, or kingdom was at all times a religious body, and, more than that, the religious organization of life. The ruler's office was holy: he was a royal or civil priest, and religion was the life of the state. The very word *liturgy* is derived from the Greek *leitourgia*, the original meaning of which was (1) a public office undertaken by a citizen at his own expense, as his service



[viii] to the body politic and (2) any service, as military service, of workmen, or of that service done to nature in the cohabitation of man and wife. The word was clearly religious: a liturgy was a public work done to promote the social and natural order. It lent itself readily, in Biblical Greek, to usage as (1) the ministry of the priests relative to prayers and sacrifices offered to God (Luke 1 :23; Heb. 8: 6, 9: 21), and (2) a gift or benefaction for the relief of the needy (2 Cor. 9: 12; Phil. 2: 30). The *leitourgos* was a public minister, a servant of the state, or of the king. St. Paul in Romans 15: 16 spoke of himself in this sense as a “leitourgon” of Jesus Christ.

The state was thus *the* religious ordering of society, and, as a result, each state was *one church*, holding a common faith, and no religious cults could flourish in a state without the permission of the state and without recognizing the state or its ruler as the mediator and divine lord. Failure to understand this has led to a misunderstanding of the history of the early church. Had the church recognized the sovereign and mediatorial role of the emperor and the City of Rome, it would have gained recognition as a legitimate cult. Legge was right in stating that the Christian’s refusal was looked upon “as a political offense.”<sup>1</sup> To deny the religious priority of the state was an act of treason. To have other gods meant to be in conspiracy for the overthrow of the body politic, of the visible god of that area, the state and its ruler. When Dooyeweerd speaks of the “pagan totality-idea,” he has reference to this religious outlook of pagan society.

Throughout most of history, therefore, the state has been man’s central religious institution, and man’s lord, savior, and shepherd. The term “shepherd,” religiously used, had reference in ancient times to God. It is so used in Scripture, and it was so used when ancient monarchs

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis Legge: *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity, From 330 B. C. to 330 A. D.*, vol. I, p. xxiv. New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1964 (1914).

[viii] spoke of themselves as “shepherds,” as the divine caretakers of, their people. The church as a separate and distinct religious institution is a newcomer to much of the world, and it has created a bitterly resented rent in the pagan order. Worship was once an aspect of the public works of the state; the state in Christian society, is no longer placed over worship but must itself acknowledge the sovereign and transcendental God.

The state cannot again become *the* religious order of society and of man without denying and destroying the church, or else absorbing it. All these attempts have occurred in Western history, and are now common to world history. The state is again seeking to establish the “pagan totality-idea,” to make itself *the* religious order of society. This is no less true in the Western democracies than in Marxist states and in the Buddhist, Islamic, and African states.

A *second* aspect of the modern state is that it claims to be the *total* order and the *sovereign* order. At this point, it is regrettable that an important concept common to Reformed thought, and to which Kuyper and Dooyeweerd have made a central contribution, is translated into English as “sphere sovereignty.” Possibly “sphere laws” might be a happier phrase. In the American tradition, the word “sovereignty” has a theological connotation: sovereignty is an attribute of God alone. The Constitutional Convention of the United States avoided all reference to the word and concept in framing the U.S. Constitution. In one of the more famous addresses of American history, on “The Jubilee of the Constitution,” in New York, April 30, 1839, John Quincy Adams associated the concepts of omnipotence and sovereignty as essentially one. The former president declared that the Americans had resisted the concept of Parliamentary omnipotence. “From the omnipotence of Parliament the colonists appealed to the rights of man and the omnipotence of the God of battles.” Adams then spoke of “The grossly im-

[x]moral and dishonest doctrine of despotic state sovereignty, the exclusive judge of its own obligations, and responsible to no power on earth or in heaven” as a revival of the old doctrine of Parliament’s omnipotence. The concept of sovereignty, he pointed out, was totally alien to the American political tradition. As late as 1918, Secretary of State Robert Lansing stated of the Peace Conference that “nine-tenths of all international difficulties arise out of the problem of sovereignty and the so-called sovereign state.”<sup>2</sup> Since 1918, the erosion has been great, and the civil order now claims sovereignty. The term “sphere sovereignty,” as used by Dooyeweerd has reference to the sovereignty of God and His law spheres over man, not that man has any sovereignty in various spheres of human action. This distinction is basic and needs to be stressed.

The modern state, however, claims to be the total order and the sovereign order. It holds, in Dooyeweerd’s terms, to the “pagan notion of a total state, embracing all life-spheres.” Sovereignty requires total jurisdiction. Because God as Creator is Lord and Sovereign over all things, His jurisdiction over all things is total and absolute. Nothing can exist apart from Him and His total law: He governs all things absolutely, so that the very hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10: 30). For philosophies which see man as a political animal, as a creature of the group, the state, as the organized social order has prior claim on man and is man’s sovereign and source of law. The modern state therefore as sovereign claims prior jurisdiction in every sphere of life. It claims the right to legislate (for the sovereign is the source of law) for every realm, and its right of legislation, however generously or cautiously applied, is a total right. The state as sovereign is simply the state as god.

This again is an ancient pagan political concept. The divinity of the social order appears in various forms in

---

<sup>2</sup> See R. J. Rushdoony: *This Independent Republic*, pp. 33-40. Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964.

[xi] pagan states. The divinity can be present in the state as such, or in the office, or in the person of the ruler, or in a combination of these factors. The political order is the definitive and the defining order of man. Tertullian ridiculed this fact in the Roman Empire: no god became a god until approved by the senate, which officially promoted heroes to that status, so that “Unless gods give satisfaction to men, there will be no deification for them: the god will have to propitiate the man.”<sup>3</sup> These men became gods, of course, simply because they expressed the “genius” of the City of Rome, because they manifested the inherent divinity of the political order.

The modern state, by its emphatic re-assertion of the “pagan totality-idea”, is making clear its claim to sovereignty and total jurisdiction, its claim to total law. The modern state therefore seeks total control: its goal is to replace the predestination of man, to substitute for God’s eternal decree the state’s temporal decree. The goal of social planning is simply this predestinarian purpose.

A *third* aspect of the modern state is its *secularism*. The modern state claims that one of its advances over the Christian state is ‘this secularism. But what is the secular state? The word “secular” comes from the Latin “saecularis,” meaning a race, generation, age, the times, or the world. Its basic meaning is this: the secular is the worldly or temporal as against the spiritual or eternal. The secular is that which belongs to the state as distinguished from the church. The secular is concerned with the world rather than with heaven, so that the secular clergy of the church is the clergy which is directly involved with people rather than with spiritual exercises and the quest for heaven. What then is the secular state? The secular state is that state which denies any transcendental claim upon itself. The secular state insists on the priority of the temporal as against the eternal. The secular state

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ante-Nicene Christian Libran-y: vol. XI, The Writing of Tertullian*, vol. I, p. 63, “Apologeticus,” 5. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872.

[xii] may deny the very existence of the eternal, but, often, it admits the existence of the eternal as a secondary order. Such a state will crown its monarch, or install its premier or president with religious ceremony, and acknowledge the Christian calendar, but it reserves unto itself all practical priority and gives a perfunctory nod of theoretical priority to God. For the secular state, the determination of time and of history is from within history, *not* from the triune God and His eternal decree. The secular state is thus of necessity the absolute and total state, and it is *the* religious order, because it has explicitly or implicitly denied transcendence. If God be acknowledged, it is only as an impotent God, no longer capable of determination. Time is no longer controlled by eternity, but eternity is either actually or potentially controlled by time. The emphasis on magic in the pagan state was this explicit faith that time could actually or potentially control eternity.

Because of these things, (i.e., the claims of the modern state to be *the* religious order, the total, sovereign order, and a secular order), the conflict of the modern state with Biblical Christianity is inescapable. This fact of conflict is often disguised. Thus, George Bernard Shaw strongly favored state aid to Christian schools as a means towards destroying them, as a means for advancing socialism. By means of subsidies, the state often seeks an ostensible alliance without for a moment altering its “pagan totality-idea.” The modern state insists its purposes are peace even as it wages total war.

These, things make all the more imperative an understanding of the Christian idea of the state, and the contribution of Herman Dooyeweerd to this understanding is an important one, both in this brief summary statement, *The Christian Idea of the State*, and in vol. III of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Chapter III. “The Structural Principle of the State.”

[xiii]

Dr. Dooyeweerd calls attention to two rival theories concerning the state. *First*, there is the widespread state absolutism of our day, in which the totalitarian state claims absolute sway over every aspect of society as the sovereign source of law and order. *Second*, there is the anti-state absolutism of the absolute individual.

In both cases sovereignty and ultimacy are made immanents, in the one case in man, in the other case, in the state. Both positions are essentially hostile to the Christian idea of the state.

As translator John Kraay points out, Dooyeweerd is concerned “with a Scripturally directed view of the state in general.” This point is important. Dooyeweerd’s writings are philosophical, and his central field is the philosophy of law and of the idea of law. It is a serious mistake, which many have made, to conclude that a philosophical position requires a point of departure or an Archimedean point within philosophical thought itself. It is also an error to attempt to absorb the Archimedean point within some kind of natural law structure. The challenge of Dooyeweerd to modern philosophy has been in part at this point. It is not our purpose at this point to analyze or to weigh the merits or demerits of his answer. Suffice it to say, that his challenge to modern philosophy cannot be neglected without a progressive demoralization of philosophy.

Our concern here is with Dooyeweerd’s analysis of the Christian idea of the state. Questions will arise as to aspects of his thesis: one important question that comes to mind is the possibility of any reconciliation of the Augustinian idea of the state as a consequence of the fall, of sin, with the Roman idea of the state as existing for the common good. Such questions are necessary and healthy for the clarification and development of an important philosophy. More important, Dooyeweerd’s philosophy of the state develops exciting and decisive insights into the history of political philosophy and man’s continuing prob-

[xiv] lem of justice and social order. Its influence has already been extensive, and there is reason to believe that its major impact is still to come. His analysis of Aristotle, Aquinas, Brunner (note the telling critique o Brunner’s “unprincipled” love), and others makes rewarding reading. It is to be hoped that this little volume will lead to rewarding reconsiderations of the Christian idea of the state.

Rousas John Rushdoony

Woodlands Hills, California

January 22, 1968

[xiv]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Emil Brunner rejects the Christian idea of the state .....	22
National Socialism and Fascism and the idea of the Christian state .....	23
The ever new, inspiring idea of the Christian state and the causes of its decline .....	24
Synthesis and Antithesis .....	25
Actually, there is but one radical and Scriptural idea of the Christian state	25
The contrast of “nature” and “grace” is non-Scriptural. Scripture posits the heart as the religious center of man’s existence .....	25
The pagan view that “reason” is the supra-temporal center of man’s being	26
The effects of compromise of Christian and pagan views. The scheme of “nature” and “grace” as a result of this compromise.....	27
Thomas Aquinas on human nature. “Nature” as portal of “grace” .....	28
Aristotle: the pagan idea of the state. The state as the highest bond of human society, of which all other societal relationships are but dependent parts .	29
The pagan totalitarian idea of the state and its revival in National Socialism and Fascism.....	29
The truly Christian view of the state takes its stance in the supra-temporal root-community of redeemed humanity in Christ Jesus.....	30
All temporal societal relationships ought to be manifestations of the supra- temporal, invisible church of Christ .....	31
The Kingdom of God as the all-embracing rule of God.....	31



The Christian idea of sphere-sovereignty over against the pagan view that the state is related to the other societal structures as the whole to its parts .....	32
The Roman Catholic view of the Christian state - Thomas Aquinas - is a falling away from the Scriptural conception .....	32
Infiltration of the pagan totality-idea in the Roman Catholic concept of the church.....	33
A false view of the Christian state: the state is subject to the temporal church-institute.....	33
Penetration of this view in modern denominational political parties.....	34
The Reformation over against the Roman Catholic view of Christian society .....	34
Nominalism in Late-Scholasticism.....	35
The nominalistic conception of the law as subjective arbitrariness and the Thomistic idea of the law as rational order .....	35
The Nominalist dualism of nature and grace.....	36
This dualism was perpetuated in Luther's law-gospel polarity.....	37
Melanchthon' s synthesis.....	38
Brunner continues Luther's dualism.....	38
Calvin breaks with the dualistic nature-grace scheme .....	39
Calvin's Scriptural view of law .....	40
The law as boundary between God and creature.....	40
Calvin's view of the divine creation-order contrasted with Thomas Aquinas	40

The principle of sphere-sovereignty: Calvin and Althusius .....	41
The greater influence of Melancthon's synthesis predominates .....	42
The humanistic ideal of science continues in the modern individualistic idea of the state .....	44
Relativizing character of modern individualism in its view of society .....	44
Humanistic natural law over against its Aristotelian - Thomistic counterpart	45
Two mainstreams in humanistic natural law and the idea of the "Rechtsstaat" in its first phase of development.....	45
The old-liberal view of the Rechtsstaat and the separation of Church and State .....	46
Tolerance in State-absolutism .....	46
The Calvinistic view of sphere-sovereignty has nothing in common with the humanistic freedom-idea of natural law .....	47
The truly Christian idea of the state cannot be separated from a recognition of sphere-sovereignty .....	48
The radical difference between sphere-sovereignty and autonomy .....	49
Autonomy is proper only to parts of a whole; sphere-sovereignty does not allow for such a relation .....	49
Sphere-sovereignty and antithesis go hand in hand in Kuyper .....	50
Kuyper broke with nature-grace and distinguished between church as institute and as organism .....	50

Elaboration of Kuyper’s views the first meaning of sphere-sovereignty, the sovereign law-spheres.....	51
Temporal reality-aspects in distinct law-spheres .....	52
The religious root-unity of the law-spheres.....	53
As sunlight diffuses itself in prismatic beauty . . . ..	53
Common grace and the grace of rebirth (palingenesis): no dualistic doctrine	53
Sphere-universality of the law-spheres.....	54
Succession of the law-spheres and the organic character of sphere-sovereignty .....	55
Disclosure and deepening of the meaning of a law-sphere .....	56
The second meaning of sphere-sovereignty: individuality-structures in things and in societal relationships.....	56
Concrete things function in all law-spheres indiscriminately. The significance of the typical end-function.....	57
The first meaning of sphere-sovereignty (law-spheres) is not voided in the individuality structure of things. The thing as individual totality .....	58
The basic error of humanistic science: the attempt to dissolve the individuality structure of a thing in a schema of lawful relations within one aspect of reality .....	59
The individuality structure of societal relationships .....	59
The typical founding-function .....	60

The structural principle of the state. The state an institution for the sake of sin. This Scriptural view not maintained by Thomas Aquinas .....	61
One-sided action for national disarmament is a neglect of the structural principle of the state.....	62
The indissoluble coherence of the typical found-function and the typical end-function of the state .....	62
The “common good” (public welfare) as jural principle and as absolutistic principle of power.....	63
The old-liberal idea of the “Rechtsstaat” proves powerless to control the absolutism of “common good” .....	64
The humanistic idea of the “Rechtsstaat” in its second, formalistic phase	64
Only the Christian idea of the state, rooted in the principle of sphere-sovereignty, is the true idea of the “Rechtsstaat.” .....	65
The task of the state cannot be limited externally by excluding the state from certain aspects of reality. ....	66
The state, with its function as political faith-community, may not be subjected to an ecclesiastical creed.....	67
The Christian faith deepens the typically political principles of justice. The Roman and the Christian idea of justice.....	67
The liberal-humanistic and the Fascistic views of justice.....	68
All non-Christian theories of the state are essentially theories of power (Machtsstaats-theorieen).....	69

The true relation of state and church: not a mechanical division, but sphere-sovereignty..... 69

The inseparable, interwoven texture of the various structures of society .. 70

The prophetic task of Christianity in these times ..... 71

## THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF THE STATE

To speak of the Christian idea<sup>1</sup> concerning the state despite contemporary confusion of thought might seem a daring undertaking. This was perhaps possible during the Middle Ages under the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church, but surely today's countless schisms within the church and the many different Christian political groups make it seem rather presumptuous, if not conceited, to presuppose a singleness of the Christian idea regarding the state.

### *Emil Brunner rejects the Christian idea of the state*

Even Protestants themselves consider - and always did - the idea of a Christian state a Roman Catholic fallacy. Emil Brunner, one of the leading figures of the so-called Swiss Theology founded by Barth, made

---

<sup>1</sup> It may be well to fix the meaning of the term "idea," as it is used by Dr. Dooyeweerd. Elsewhere he explains as follows:

"The idea in this transcendental sense has the necessary function to fix theoretical thought upon its presupposita. The theoretical 'concept' has the function to discriminate the different aspects of reality. The transcendental idea, on the contrary, concentrates theoretical thought on their common radical unity and final Origin" (*Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, pp.. 75-76).

Dr. Dooyeweerd distinguishes between presuppositions and presupposita: "These presupposita (of all theoretical thought) should not be confused with the subjective pre-suppositions or prejudices, on which a philosophical course of thoughts is founded, and in which the subjective view of the supposita is contained" (*Transcendental Problems*, p. 19).

[2] the following sharp statement in his well-known book *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*<sup>2</sup> (1932): “The Christian state never existed, and it never will.” According to him it was precisely one of the fundamental concepts of the Reformation that the state, instituted because of the Fall, does not belong to the “Kingdom of Christ,” but rather to the natural, secular ordinances. He claims that a Christian state is as impossible as a Christian culture, Christian learning, economy, art, or Christian social action. Brunner views all life in the temporal world, permeated as it is by sin, as belonging to the area of nature. Here “worldly ordinances” are valid. It is the realm of law as loveless rule, from which the Christian has been liberated in his inner life of grace, so that he can act in accordance with Christ’s command of love of the moment. *Nature* (the realm of temporal world life outside faith, subject to inflexible “ordinances”) and *grace* (the faith-realm of the supra-temporal kingdom of God, subject to the commandment of love which has - within the Christian - broken with law as an everywhere valid rule and put it aside), are for Brunner unbridgeably separated. The Roman Catholic Church erred when it propagated the idea of a “Christian world-life” and thus also a “Christian state.” Such a view, he claims, is only possible if a temporal church hierarchy can be accepted as ruler of both state and other secular societal relationships - a government that the Reformation has principally rejected.

*National Socialism and Fascism and the idea of the Christian state*

If we now turn to look at the recently evolved use of the term “Christian state” by National Socialism and Fascism, the picture of spiritual chaos is complete. For these bring together in a tempting way both the pagan notion of a total state, embracing all life-spheres, and

---

<sup>2</sup> English translation: *The Divine Imperative* (1937).

[3] the Christian concept of solidarity and love to one's neighbor.

Indeed, never did the idea of the Christian state seem more problematic than today!

Add to this that the spiritual chaos of our restless times penetrates alarmingly in our own ranks, that many hardly comprehend what positive power of attraction Calvinistic political principles can have<sup>3</sup>, and one can understand the half-hidden coolness with which many Christians speak of the "Christian idea of the State."

*The ever new, inspiring idea of the Christian state and the causes of its decline*

And yet the idea of the Christian state will not be sidelined as an abstract notion that has "served its hitch," and now belongs to a dead tradition. Rather, it is still a spiritual treasure, ever new, ever living and inspiring, touching the very heart of one's Christian life - a treasure which we must keep at all costs.

The fundamental cause of the inner weakening of Christian political thought, yes, of the entire Christian mode of life among many Christians in our day, lies not so much in external factors but in inner decay, threatening Christianity from the beginning in its positive endeavor regarding culture, learning, political life and social movement. This was also the danger of which Joshua, called by God, warned the Israelites when they had arrived in the promised land, namely, integration with heathen peoples and the search for a compromise between the service of Jehovah and the worship of idols.

As soon as Christianity began to compromise learning, culture, and political life with pagan and humanistic philosophy, with its view of state and culture, Christianity's inner strength was broken. At that moment the process of "becoming like unto the world" began, repeatedly arrested through the grace of God by a spiritual *reveil*, a Reformation.

---

<sup>3</sup> References to Dutch historical events are omitted.



[4] *Synthesis and Antithesis*

Time and time again such a reformation had to affirm the uncompromising antithesis against the weakening synthesis, the spirit of compromise with the world.

Is it possible that after the latest Calvinistic *reveil* under the inspiring Kuyper<sup>4</sup> this process has again repeated itself? Did the spirit of synthesis perhaps infiltrate almost unnoticeably also in our own circles? Is it true that Calvinism as a cultural and political movement has lost its sharp edges? Did it become fashionable and acceptable to the world because gradually it became identified with liberalism of a Christian stamp?

If so, surely it is high time that once again we realize the radical antithesis that separates the Christian idea of the state from all pagan and humanistic views.

*Actually, there is but one radical and Scriptural idea of the Christian state*

It is not true that the Christian view of the state is divided into as many interpretations as there are Christian political groups or movements. These differences are rather the fruit of the monster-marriage of Christianity with the movements of the age, which arise from the spirit of this world:

The genuinely Christian idea of the state is rooted in the radical, Scriptural view regarding the relationship between the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus and the temporal societal structures, in which God's general or common grace arrests the dry-rot caused by sin. What then, is this view?

*The contrast of "nature" and "grace" is non-Scriptural. Scripture posits the heart as the religious center of man's existence*

---

4 Abraham Kuyper, (1837-1920), Christian statesman, founder of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, and prolific author.

[5] God's Word does not teach us a contrast between "nature" and "grace," that is, between the nature of God's creation and the redemption in Christ Jesus. It teaches only and exclusively the radical, uncompromising antithesis of sin and redemption, of the realm of darkness and the Kingdom of God in Christ.

God created man in His image. In the heart of man, the religious root, the center of his being, God concentrated all of creation toward His service; here He laid the supra-temporal root of all temporal creatures. This human heart, from which according to Scripture come the wellsprings of life, transcends all things temporal in the service of God. The whole religious sense (meaning) of God's creation lies in our heart, our entire ego, our complete self. This heart, in which according to the Word eternity has been laid, is the true supra-temporal center of man's existence, and at the same time it is the creaturely center of all of God's creation. The apostasy of this heart, of this root of creation, necessarily swept with it all temporal creation. In Adam not only all mankind fell, but also that entire temporal cosmos of which man was the crowned head. And in Christ, the Word become flesh, the second Covenant Head, God gave the new root of His redeemed creation, in Whom true humanity has been implanted through self-surrender, through surrender of the center of existence, the heart.

*The pagan view that "reason" is the supra-temporal center of man's being*

Pagan philosophy, however, taught that the nature of man, and in it the nature of all temporal things, finds its supra-temporal center in "reason." But this "reason" is in reality nothing other than a composite of temporal functions of consciousness, functions of our self, aspect of our heart in the full scriptural sense. Temporal organic-biotic life, feeling, sense of beauty, our function in historical development, in language, in

[6] jural and economic life, etc. - all these are also functions of the heart in this sense.

The kingship of man in God's undefiled creation did not lie in his "rational-moral" nature, but in this great mystery: that God concentrated all of His creation in man's heart, in man's whole self, and brought creation together in this deeper unity.

The Fall, the fundamental separation from God, consisted in this: man's heart rebelled against its divine Origin; man thought himself to be something by virtue of himself; he sought himself and with that, God, in temporality. This was the idolatry in the apostasy from the true God, as He had revealed Himself in the heart of man through His Word.

A manifestation of this apostasy was also the pagan view that natural human existence has its origin in reason as *supposed* supra-temporal center, and that God Himself is the Absolute, that is *idolized, Reason* (Aristotle) . Sad to say Christian thought has largely taken this over in the area of so-called "natural" knowledge.

*The effects of compromise of Christian and pagan views. The scheme of "nature" and "grace" as a result of this compromise*

As soon as Christian thought had compromised with this pagan philosophy, the truly Scriptural relationship between life in the temporal world and the Kingdom of God was no longer understood and false philosophical constructions began to obscure the profound clear truth of God's revelation.

The heart was no longer understood in the Scriptural sense because men no longer understood themselves; and they no longer understood themselves because they had obscured the true knowledge of God with an impossible compromise with apostate philosophical speculations. The "heart" became identified with the temporal psychical function, which was considered the stimulant of the will. That is why men of the Middle Ages began

[7] to argue the question which in “human” and “divine” nature, has priority: the intellect (reason) or the will, which according to Greek philosophy arises out of the function of feeling. Thus they also construed a false contrast between “nature” and “grace” because “nature” was considered to be the God-created structure of reality as seen in the light of Greek philosophy, and “grace” the supra-temporal revelation of God, including all Christ’s redemptive work.

*Thomas Aquinas on human nature. “Nature” as portal of “grace”*

Christ, the Word become flesh, was now no longer seen as the New Root of the order of creation, as the Rectifier of true nature. “Nature, “concentrated in “reason,” was declared self-sufficient and autonomous in her own area, the temporal world order. Thomas Aquinas, prince of Roman Catholic Scholasticism, made natural reason independent of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. Learning, morality, political life, and “natural theology” were then, as autonomous areas of natural reason, practiced in a pagan-Aristotelian manner. But in addition to this intrinsically pagan idea of “nature,” a “supra-temporal” area of grace was construed which transcends natural reason and can only be apprehended by the light of God’s revelation. “Nature “was made a lower autonomous portal of “grace,” and the latter would merely bring the former to “higher perfection.”

The Christian view of the Fall now had to be accommodated to this pagan conception of “nature” as well. The Scriptural view of a center of human nature in the heart, the religious root, had been abandoned in favor of the Aristotelian concept viewing “reason “as the origin of human nature. Thus it could no longer be admitted that human nature is depraved in its very root because of the falling away from God of the heart. Instead, it was taught that “nature” was not completely spoiled by sin, but merely “wounded,” that is, the supranatural gift of grace had been lost.

[8]Aristotle: *the pagan idea of the state. The state as the highest bond of human society, of which all other societal relationships are but dependent parts*

What did this mean in terms of the idea of the state? The state was counted with the so-called “natural realm” and the pagan, Aristotelian view was taken over. This view came down to this: The state is the highest form of the community. All other societal relationships, such as marriage, family, blood-relation, vocational and industrial groupings, all these are merely lower components which serve the higher. According to Aristotle, the state is grounded in the “rational-moral” nature of man. Man cannot realize his natural perfection in isolation, but only within the community. Marriage and family nurture are the first, “lower” necessities of life, the “next higher” are fulfilled by the village community. But these lower societal relationships are not autonomous; only the state can, as perfectly autonomous community, provide man with all that serves the perfection of his “rational-moral” nature.

Thus the relation between the state and other temporal societal relationships is constructed according to the scheme of *the whole and its parts* and of the *goal and the means*, from the “lower” to the “higher.” The “lower” relationships as different kinds of parts of the state have no goal in themselves, but all must serve the state. Man is by nature a state-oriented being, for already in the forming of marriage, family, and blood-relations the natural compulsion to form the state is germinating. By nature the state exists before the individual. The state is implicit in the rational-moral nature, as the mature form of a plant in its seed, or the full-grown body of an animal in its embryo.

*The pagan totalitarian idea of the state and its revival in National Socialism and Fascism*

This Aristotelian idea of the state was the philo-

[9]sophical expression of the ancient Greek popular conviction. People really saw the state as the highest rung of man's moral development, as the highest and most perfect body to which the free citizen had to subject all areas of life. It was very much like the idea of the totalitarian state as recently taken up by Fascism and National-Socialism, although here the idea is no longer based on a so-called "metaphysical" order of reason, but is oriented irrationally to the community feeling of the people (*das Volk*).

Originally this pagan view of the state was grounded in the doctrine that human existence is rooted in a "rational-moral" nature, that from this spring the directions of life, and that reason is the supra-temporal center, the deeper unity of human existence. As we have seen, this view is directly opposed to God's Word-revelation in Jesus Christ. It originated from an idolatrous, apostate conception concerning the center of man's being, from a lack of self-knowledge caused by an idolatrous conception of God (making "reason" divine).

*The truly Christian view of the state takes its stance in the supra-temporal root-community of redeemed humanity in Christ Jesus*

Christian religion had laid the axe to the religious root of this pagan idea of the state, and with that to the root of the whole pagan conception of temporal society. It revealed the true supra-temporal root of all temporal human societal structures grounded in the God-created world-order, that is, the religious root-community of mankind in the Kingdom of God, which must reign in the heart of man.

That deepest root-unity of mankind had fallen to the kingdom of Satan through Adam, but through Christ it has been redeemed and renewed.

Thus the "Church of Christ" – not in temporal diffused form, but in the supra-temporal unity in Christ – this church is the true root of all temporal societal

[10] relationships as required by God in His creation plan, just as all the temporal functions of human existence physical movement, biotic life, feeling, thought, justice, morality and faith - must stem from the heart, the religious center.

*All temporal societal relationships ought to be manifestations of the supra-temporal, invisible church of Christ*

In other words, all temporal societal relationships, including state and organized church-institute, are, in accordance with their God-willed structure, merely temporal manifestations, temporal expressions of the one and only true supra-temporal root-community of renewed mankind in the “body of Christ,” the “invisible church” of which Christ is the only Head.

*The Kingdom of God as the all-embracing rule of God*

We see here that Christianity proclaims a total rule of God, opposed to the pagan idea of the total state as light is opposed to darkness. Paganism, unable to transcend time, seeks a last and highest temporal bond of which all other societal relationships can be no more than dependent parts. Christianity does not place a temporal church-institute above the state as an ultimate bond, but in Christ it looks beyond time toward the total theocracy, the invisible church of Christ. Here all temporal societal relationships are rooted and grounded, and each of these, after its own divine structure and God-given law, must be an expression, be it an imperfect one, of that invisible Kingdom of God.

This basic Christian idea<sup>5</sup> of the Kingdom of God is the only possible ground for the Christian idea of the state.

---

<sup>5</sup> *grondgedachte* (I shall occasionally note the Dutch for this word and similar ones.)

[11]*The Christian idea<sup>6</sup> of sphere-sovereignty over against the pagan view that the state is related to the other societal structures as the whole to its parts*

This idea of the Kingdom of God is directly opposed to the apostate view of temporal society, that is, the self-willed, rational view which construes the mutual relation and deeper unity of temporal societal bonds as one of part and whole; one total state and the other societal relationships its parts. But neither marriage, nor family, nor blood-relation, nor the free types of social existence, whether they are organized or not, can be considered as part of an all-embracing state. Every societal relationship has received from God its own structure and law of life, sovereign in its own sphere.

The Christian world and life view, illumined by the revealed Word of God, posits sphere-sovereignty of the temporal life spheres over against the pagan totality idea.

However, if this idea of sphere-sovereignty is typified as peculiarly Calvinistic, we must protest. We must protest also when other views, which reject this sphere-sovereignty because they have compromised with pagan philosophy, are considered as at least comparable Christian views. There is only *one* Christian view concerning human relationships which indeed takes seriously, without compromise, the Scriptural principle<sup>7</sup> of the Kingdom of God.

*The Roman Catholic view of the Christian state - Thomas Aquinas - is a falling away from the Scriptural conception*

Roman Catholic thought concerning human society fell away from this Scriptural basis when it compromised with Aristotelian philosophy. It accepts the Aristotelian

---

<sup>6</sup> *idee*

<sup>7</sup> *grondgedachte*



[12] idea of the state for the area of “nature;” and believes it can accommodate this to the Christian idea of the total rule of God by building another level, the realm of “grace,” above the pagan edifice of nature.

But this departure from Scripture also penetrated views concerning the grace of the “Civitas Dei.”

*Infiltration of the pagan totality-idea in the Roman Catholic concept of the church*

It was not foreseen that the pagan totality-idea, which seeks in temporal society an “ultimate bond” of which all else can only be parts, would influence the Roman Catholic *view of the church*.

The state was seen in pagan manner as the totality of all temporal societal relationships in the *natural* (rational-moral) area. Now in turn it is looked upon as a lower serving part of the temporal church-institute. The church was now considered to be the total bond of all Christendom, the rule of the realm of grace in its temporal manifestation. In other words, the temporal church-institute with its papal hierarchy came to be identified with the so-called “invisible church,” the supra-temporal Kingdom of God in the body of Christ.

*A false view of the Christian state: the state is subject to the temporal church-institute.*

This immediately had a fateful influence upon Thomas’ idea of the Christian state. Its Christian character was not Scripturally sought in the expression of Christ’s Kingdom within the inner structure of the state itself, but Roman Catholicism continued to see the inner structure of the state in the old pagan way as the total bond of all natural society, and continued to deduce the principles for political life by “natural reason,” apart from revelation.

The state can participate in the realm of grace, not from within but, since it is itself strictly natural, it can do this only by enlisting in the service of the temporal

[13] church-institute. This service consists in the eradication of heresy and paganism, and the subjection of the state to church leadership in all things that the church judges to touch the welfare of souls. Such and only such a state can be called Christian.

*Penetration of this view in modern denominational political parties*

This Roman Catholic error continues even today in all those halfway Christian political conceptions that consider the Christian character of the state to consist in its ties to a given church-institute (thus in general every denominational grouping in politics).<sup>8</sup>

The notion that the Christian state must recognize a certain denomination as “state-church,” or at least as the only true church, or that the Christian state must lend to a certain creed as “alone true” the status of official legal authority, essentially stems from this old conception of Roman Scholasticism which ascribes the totality of all temporal revelation of the body of Christ to just such a temporal church institute.

*The Reformation over against the Roman Catholic view of Christian society*

From the very start the Reformation has protested vehemently against this basic error. For its starting point it returned to the invisible church, the supra-temporal body of Christ. It placed itself squarely over against the Roman Catholic *identification* of this invisible church (the total rule of God) with the temporal church-institute. The Reformation broke with the Roman Catholic view concerning the relation of nature and grace, at least theologically. It rejected the Church’s teaching that the Fall has not corrupted the root of “natural” existence, but has only caused a “supra-temporal gift of grace” to be lost. Consequently, the Ref-

---

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Dooyeweerd mentions some Dutch political parties in this connection, which are omitted here.

[14]-ormation condemned the Roman Catholic doctrine of “natural merit of good works” and proclaimed again with power the good message of justification by faith alone.

And yet, this Scriptural, radically Christian basis did not, particularly in Luther, consistently penetrate the Reformation’s view of temporal human society and its conception of the Christian state.

### *Nominalism in Late-Scholasticism*

Already in the late Middle Ages (14th century), a line of thought had turned itself against the compromise that Thomas Aquinas had sought to effect between Christian faith and Aristotelian philosophy. This line was to become of world-wide importance, and is known by the name “Late-Scholastic Nominalism.” The father of this movement was the English Franciscan William of Ockham. What did this movement want? As we saw above, the whole Aristotelian- Thomist view of the “realm of nature” (in distinction from the “realm of grace “) was rooted in an absolutization of rational functions. In the Being of God intellect was also held to be predominant. This idea came out most strongly in Thomas’s thesis: The good is not good because God commands it, but God *had to* command the good, since it was good. That is, it was grounded in the general *concept* of good because it agrees with the “rational-moral” nature of man. This is in flagrant disagreement with the Scriptural teaching of God’s sovereign will. The Creator, far above all human measure, is not Himself subject to a law, for He is the Origin of all law, the Origin also of the norm of good and evil.

### *The nominalistic conception of the law as subjective arbitrariness and the Thomistic idea of the law as rational order*

The nominalist movement wished to reassert God’s sovereignty as Creator over against Thomas’s deification

[15] of reason in the realm of nature. But how did it go about this? Instead of positing truly Scriptural thought over against Thomas it explained God's holy, sovereign Creator's will as despotic voluntarism. Nominalism spoke of *Deus ex lex*, that is to say, a God whose laws are grounded purely upon disposition. God, Ockham thought, could just as well have willed an egotistical moral law instead of the Ten Commandments.

Of course, Nominalism, distorting the Christian teaching of God as sovereign Creator into a tyrannical voluntarism divorced from the holiness of God, overthrew Thomism, which had championed a doctrine of a rational moral nature, and of a natural moral law grounded in reason. The law as general rule rooted in reason, loses, in this nominalism, the lofty position Thomas had accorded it in his rationalistic world of thought. The law is pulled down to a lower level. God Himself is not bound by law. But even the Christian is elevated above the law, at least in his inner life of grace. Law is merely the positive ordering of temporal world-life, where sin reigns. And even when the Church and Scripture posit laws for external society, the Christian has no longer anything to do with these ordinances in his inner life. He must subject himself to this utterly incomprehensible positive command of the will of God, but merely externally, and as long as he moves in the temporal world. From the inner life of grace the law has been removed.

#### *The Nominalist dualism of nature and grace*

This nominalistic view of law radically destroyed the artificial compromise that Thomas Aquinas had attempted to construct between the pagan-Aristotelian conception of "nature" and the Christian understanding of "grace."

Thomas had taught: "nature" (understood in the rationalistic sense of Aristotle) is the lower, serving portal of "grace," the lower "matter" which, through

[16] divine grace of which the Church is the dispensary, is brought to “higher form” and higher perfection.

This line of thought became unacceptable to nominalism. “Nature” continued to be understood in all its manifestations in learning, statesmanship, family life, etc., as the lower realm subject to law. But the natural order could no longer be considered the portal of the order of grace. “Nature” as realm of law had come into implacable opposition to “grace” as area of Christian freedom (nominalistically understood). Now it was but one more step to identify the ordinances of “natural life” with the “sinful world,” where harsh and inexorable law serves only to curb the wantonness of man.

There is really no place in such nominalistic thought for Christian learning, Christian political theory, or Christian organizational life. All of these belong in this view to the “kingdom of this world,” to “sinful (human) nature,” to the area of law, from which the Christian has been freed in his inner life through grace in Christ. Created nature became in no sense more Christian than in Thomas’s thinking. On the contrary, it was completely cut off from the church, put on its own feet, and left to its own laws, as an autonomous area over against that of grace. Thus it is that nominalism, in bitter opposition to the hierarchical view of Thomas and his followers, began everywhere to resist the supremacy that the Church-institute had had during the 10th-13th centuries over learning, economic life, etc. - “nature” and “grace” were separated, unbridgeably so.

*This dualism was perpetuated in Luther’s law-gospel polarity*

Luther had been brought up in this nominalistic line of thought before his appearance as Reformer. His own testimony is: “Ich bin von Ockman’s Schule.” Although Luther’s living and mighty faith radically broke with Roman-Scholasticism in theology and church-life, and thus opened the way for the further development

[17] of the Reformation, he still retained in his world and life view the old nominalistic dualism of nature and grace, now as the polarity of *law* and evangelical *freedom*.

#### *Melanchthon's synthesis*

Melanchthon was soon able to search once more for a synthesis between Luther's reformational view of Scripture, classical philosophy, *and* the contemporary humanistic way of thinking which continued the nominalistic strain in the realm of nature and proclaimed human personality as sovereign ruler of the cosmos.

#### *Brunner continues Luther's dualism*

In contemporary thought this dualism has been consistently carried through in Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. Hence their radical rejection of the idea of Christian culture, Christian learning, and Christian political life.

Brunner, in his *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*, teaches the autonomy of the whole natural realm of ordinances (the area of law) over against the grace-realm of the Christian faith which is not subjected to the law (ordinances), but acts in freedom in accordance with the evangelical command of love. The latter does not posit a general rule for action, but is, according to Brunner, nothing other than the voice of a calling God who places us at every turn before the responsibility of a single, concrete decision, never to return in the same form. Christian love, in his view, never acts in accordance with principles. It is in the full sense of the word *unprincipled*. The Christian statesman, as politician, must never reach for the impossible ideal of a Christian political theory according to Christian principles. The command of love, says Brunner, heard in faith, certainly calls him to political activity, but for the fulfilment of his task it points to the "natural ordinances," to political life with its "law unto itself" - a

[18] law really in contradiction with Christian love. The Christian need never rationalize this contradiction; the whole sinful world, according to Brunner, is full of it.

However, when certain existing laws do not allow the Christian the freedom to fulfill his task of love toward his neighbor, then he must strive for a better ordinance, also politically. But here again, it is not faith that decides, but only natural reason, which the Christian has in common with all mankind. Therefore, no Christian political parties, but the greatest possible cooperation of all, regardless of their life-view or their religion. Such a group can, in a realistic manner, work towards a given political improvement, e.g., in Brunner's case, to do away with today's mammon-inspired capitalist system. The Christian may not always find the necessary support of the existing parties for his program. Again, perhaps these parties are possessed of so demonic a spirit that no Christian can possibly attach himself to them. If that is the case, the Christian may decide to form a temporary group of his own, but he never has the right to call such a party "Christian."

*Calvin breaks with the dualistic nature-grace scheme*

The truly radical break with the nature-grace scheme, inaugurated during the Middle Ages, really begins with Calvin. With that, the way was finally and truly opened up toward building the Christian world and life view in the Scriptural sense, without compromise with paganistic and humanistic lines of thought.

In Calvin we no longer find law placed over against nominalistic evangelical freedom. Paul's message of the Christian's freedom from the curse of the law and his rejection of Pharisaic self-justification go hand in hand with the Scriptural view that the creature is subject to God's ordinances, completely and everywhere. An ordinance of creation is not to be viewed, as nominalism taught, as a divinely despotic command holding

[19] only for the lower area of “nature,” and to be obeyed merely externally, but as a holy, wise, and perfectly good ordinance of the Highest Majesty, without Whom the created cosmos would fall apart in utter chaos.

### *Calvin’s Scriptural view of law*

Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, taught that the temporal ordinances of God find their deeper unity in a rational idea of God. But for Calvin the deeper unity lies in the religious fulness of God’s law: service toward God with the whole heart. Created human nature is, whenever Calvin allows Scripture to speak, no longer concentrated in the rational-moral functions, but in the heart, the supra-temporal religious root of human existence. Thus Scripture could be understood again. Christ, the New Root of reborn humanity, is the Fulfiller of the law, that is, He has fulfilled the law of God in the religious fulness and unity of its meaning.

This radically Christian beginning of Calvin’s world and life view *had* to become of far-reaching significance for the whole Calvinistic conception of the relation between temporal cosmos and supra-temporal Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus.

### *The law as boundary between God and creature*

Calvin sees the law as the actual boundary between the sovereign God and His creature, and takes this law as divine ordinance in its deepest meaning to be *directed to the heart* as center, not to “Reason.” Only God is, not subject to this law, not because His will would be despotic, but because His holy, wise, and perfectly good I will is the Origin of all norm of good and evil. God ‘ gave every temporal sphere of life its own law in accordance with His will.

### *Calvin’s view of the divine creation-order contrasted with Thomas Aquinas*



[20] Calvin chose his starting-point in the supra-temporal religious root-unity of the divine law as revealed by Christ Jesus and fulfilled by Him. With respect to the temporal fulness and diversity of ordinances which God has laid in temporal life therefore, the insight had to follow that none of these temporal spheres can be derived from or valued lower than any other.

Aristotle and Thomas, as we saw earlier, thought the spheres could be so derived and valued. But then, this conception did not spring from the Scriptural view of the true supra-temporal root-unity and Origin of divine law, but from self-willed-human rational constructs. It sprang from the autonomy of reason and considered the rational-moral functions the actual supra-temporal and “immortal” center of human existence. Thus, this view also claimed the divine world-order to be an order originating in reason, where all spheres of life are ordered in an ascending scale from lower to higher, from means to end. In the realm of natural society the state became the highest bond - all other relationships were considered its serving parts.

But from a truly Scripturally Christian standpoint such a view of the divine world-order, essentially pagan, can only be radically rejected. For then we begin with the true Root of creation, Christ Jesus as fulfillment of divine Word-Revelation. From here the root, the supra-temporal unity, the deeper unity of all creation, is seen in Christ, Whose Kingdom has been established in the hearts. From this standpoint the true Origin of all temporal ordinances is not seen deified in “Reason,” but in the holy will of God, the sovereign Creator.

*The principle<sup>9</sup> of sphere-sovereignty: Calvin and Althusius*

From this truly supra-temporal Christian religious standpoint the relationship among the temporal ordin-

---

<sup>9</sup> Sphere-sovereignty is often referred to as a “grond-principle.”

[21]ances can only be understood as sphere-sovereignty. This basic, cosmic principle Calvin grasped in essence, and worked out with great clarity in his teaching regarding the temporal church-institute, maintaining its inner independence from the state.

In the 17th century a Calvinistic German jurist, Johannes Althusius, oriented his social teaching to this principle.<sup>10</sup>

*The greater influence of Melanchthon's synthesis predominates*

But this Scriptural line of thought could not immediately develop unhindered. The predominant influence of Melanchthon's synthesis program - another compromise between Christian and pagan thought held sway in Protestant universities and from there took over leadership in practical life, particularly in political life. Calvin had not been able to free himself completely from Greco-Roman political theory, but Melanchthon once again sought his support there!

Under these circumstances the Christian idea of the state relapsed into Medieval-Scholastic patterns: the state, part of the realm of "nature," could only receive its Christian stamp through serving the temporal church-community; except that, instead of a Roman Catholic church-institute, it was now the state-church (*Landes Kirche*). Again the ground-motive of the Reformation was caught in an intrinsically impossible synthesis with pagan philosophy. No wonder that the ensuing ages witness a gradual decline of the principles of the Reformation.

A new life and world view began to triumph in modern Western culture. Humanism, utterly oriented to this temporal life, placed the sovereignty of the human personality central. Originally it had joined the Ref-

---

10 Cf. *The Politics of Johannes Althusius*, Abridged and translated by Frederick S. Catney, with a Preface by Carl J. Friedrich Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

[22]ormation, struggling to overthrow the rule of the church-institute over all natural life, but" now it pushed its former ally into a corner.

*The rise of the modern humanistic world and life view*

Humanism secularized the message of Christian freedom and of creation, Fall, and redemption. Scripture's revelation of creation by God was gradually displaced by the idea of the creative power of science. Christian freedom was metamorphosed into sovereign freedom of the human personality. The humanistic world and life view was concentrated in two ground-motives: the humanistic ideal of personality and the new science-ideal. The first meant to teach absolute autonomy, self-sufficient "ethical determination." The second was intent upon a construction of the temporal world-coherence, based on the "autonomy of scientific thought."

*The overpowering influence of the new mathematical science-ideal upon modern culture*

Very quickly this new world and life view assumed a leading role in the shaping of modern culture. Leadership of science (*Wissenschaft*) was in humanistic hands. The new humanistic science-idea was inspired by a motive of dominance, a striving for power – the whole world was to be subjected to the sovereign human personality. Very quickly it oriented itself to the mathematical natural science which arose in the 16th century.

The new humanistic science-ideal received a dominant importance in the humanistic world-view and with its individualistic and rationalistic consequence it was simply impossible to combine it with a recognition of the Christian principle of sphere-sovereignty, because here is posited a rich diversity of the temporal cosmos in inner indissoluble coherence of its differentiated aspects. Instead of God's sovereign will as Creator, creative mathematical thought was declared to be the

[23] origin of all laws that regulate temporal life. And since mathematical thought seeks to construct all complex figures from the simplest elements, humanistic philosophy tried to do the same with the complex oneness of the temporal world. Insofar as it was able to be consistent in its application of the new science ideal, humanism tried to deduce all temporal order from one single, simple, natural-scientific law. Thus the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (17th century) tried to construe the temporal cosmos theoretically from a mechanistic principle of attraction and repulsion.

The other pole, the humanistic personality-ideal with its idea of freedom did not become predominant in humanistic philosophy until later.

*The humanistic ideal of science continues in the modern individualistic idea of the state*

When applied to temporal society, this new science ideal led to the view that all societal relationships from family to state and church have to be constructed from their “simplest mathematical components,” here meaning individuals, abstract units. It was held that these individuals must be thought of as originally in a “state of nature” where perfect equality and freedom reigned. But now, in a so-called “social contract” they have given up more or less of this freedom to the state, the *body* of citizens.

It is obvious that this view was permeated with remnants of nominalism: positive ordinances that hold within the societal bonds were understood in terms of the arbitrary will of individuals united in a social contract. The constitution was then the “*volonte generale*” (general will). No individual can complain of injustice for in the social contract (Rousseau: *contract social*) he has himself agreed to all laws the state might impose.

*Relativizing character of modern individualism in its view of society*

This individualistic view of society, fruit of the

[24] new humanistic ideal of science, erased all the limits or borders that God in His wisdom had set in His temporal world order. For every societal relationship (family, state, church, etc.) God has posited its own law of life; He created in each of them an inner structure, in its own sphere sovereign. But on the strength of its whole scheme humanistic rationalism had come in conflict with such a creed. All societal relationships were explained in terms of a uniform abstract scheme of social contract.

*Humanistic natural law over against its Aristotelian - Thomistic counterpart*

The school of humanistic natural law (from Hugo Grotius to Rousseau, Rant and Fichte) defended this individualistic theory of society.

We are here dealing with a principally different doctrine from that of the Aristotelian- Thomistic line. True, the latter also started with natural right, that is, the rational principles of justice and morality that are created part and parcel of human nature. But here an individual human being was not considered to be self-sufficient by nature, but was a member of the social community, the state. Aristotle and Thomas had taught that by nature the state existed before the individual. Thus they rejected, principally, any individualistic conception of a natural state without societal relationships. They did not want to construct a state out of the individual, like humanistic natural law, but rather the other way around - out of the state the individual.

*Two mainstreams in humanistic natural law and the idea of the  
“Rechtsstaat”<sup>11</sup> in its first phase of development.*

---

11 There is no English equivalent for the Dutch (and German) term Rechtsstaat. The term can be applied to a state in which a constitutional or accepted law and order is maintained; e.g., in sentences like: The Magna Carta safeguarding the English Rechtsstaat; Hitler abolished the German Rechtsstaat and replaced it with his dictatorial National-Socialist regime. Elsewhere, Prof. Dooyeweerd also uses “rule of law.”

[25] We can distinguish two main streams in the development of humanistic natural law (1) *state-absolutism* (Grotius, Hobbes, Pufendorff, Rousseau, and others), where all freedom of the individual is lost to the state, and (2) *antistate-absolutism* (Locke, Rant, and others), which starts from inviolate absolute constitutional rights of the individual over against the state, and thus seeks to limit the state task to organized safeguarding of these rights.

From the latter came the *old-liberal theory of the Rechtsstaat*<sup>11</sup> with its doctrine of the inviolate constitutional rights of the individual (such as freedom of the press, free enterprise, association, etc.), and with its teaching of the separation of powers (separate legislative, executive and judicial powers). In practice, this theory has become a powerful co-influence in the modern idea of the state, but in its individualistic-humanistic basis it was in sense Christian in origin. That basis underlies the old-liberal “*laissez faire*” program that rejects any “encroachment” of the state on economic life, particularly in industry.

#### *The old-liberal view of the Rechtsstaat and the separation of Church and State*

That basis also underlies the humanistic idea of tolerance in the old-liberal sense, which seeks complete separation of church and state, and constructs the temporal church-institute as a private organization, again with the help of a uniform social contract - an organization where the individual is the sovereign authority (collegial or congregational type of church-government). There is no room for a truly Christian idea of the state. The Christian religion has been relegated to the inner chamber.

#### *Tolerance in State-absolutism*

In opposition to this main stream, however, the other movement in humanistic natural law, State-absolutism,

[26] taught the absolute sovereignty of state over church, and denied the church any internally independent law-sphere (this is so-called territorial church-government: the state has to maintain tolerance within the church; it opposes any doctrinal discipline). Such were the tenets of Hugo Grotius and the Arminians, and in Germany particularly Thomasius.

The natural law idea of the state in Antistate-absolutism with its view of the *Rechtsstaat* has been linked unjustly with Calvinism. Liberalism (Otto Gierke in Germany, Eigeman in the Netherlands) was always intent on presenting the Calvinistic idea of sphere sovereignty as derived from the liberal natural law view of the state. Even a Calvin scholar, the well-known Frenchman Doumergue, sees in Calvin the forerunner of the ideas of freedom of the French Revolution. It is true that the Calvinistic idea of the state has been infiltrated at times with humanistic natural law; but, insofar as that is the case, it must be seen as nothing less than a principal falling away from the Scriptural, Christian view of the state.

*The Calvinistic view of sphere-sovereignty has nothing in common with the humanistic freedom-idea of natural law*

After all, humanistic natural law begins with a supposed sovereignty of the human personality and that taken individualistically. Calvinism begins with God's sovereignty, revealed in religious fulness in the supratemporal kingdom of Christ, and intended to shine forth from this root-community in all temporal societal forms. Humanistic natural law recognizes only "constitutional rights" of the individual, but it misjudges and levels the genuine societal structures as they have been grounded in the temporal world-order through God's sovereign will as Creator. That is why humanism, when it comes to the relation between state and other societal relationships, can only base this relation on the natural (i.e., born-into) rights of the individual.

[27] Again, Calvinism begins from the Scriptural message of solidarity, from the religious root-community of mankind in creation, Fall, and redemption. From this supra-temporal religious structure complex we behold the richly diversified panorama of temporal societal structures. In this God's sovereign will holds for humanity and these structures cannot be constructed after a scheme of a whole and its parts or a relativized individualistic social contract: they can be understood in their mutual relation only by way of the principle of sphere-sovereignty.

By the same token, whoever rejects this Scriptural principle *cannot* understand the idea of the Christian state in its truly Scriptural sense. For, as we saw, the genuine idea of the Christian state begins with the religious ground-idea of a supra-temporal Christian church, which reveals itself temporally in all societal structures equally. Denial of sphere-sovereignty is the immediate consequence whenever one chooses a starting-point for a world and life view in temporal reality.

Such a starting-point within temporal reality has occasioned the absolutization of reason by some thinkers; others made too much of a certain temporal societal relationship-church or state; still others overestimated the abstract, mathematical component that the individual was held to be, and consequently constructed and relativized all societal structures after the uniform scheme of social contract.

*The truly Christian idea of the state cannot be separated from a recognition of sphere-sovereignty*

Since it appears that the truly Christian idea of the state stands in indissoluble coherence with the recognition of sphere-sovereignty, this principle must first be investigated more closely. The more so since its true sense is often no longer understood, even in our own circles. Hence it is that "sphere-sovereignty" is



[28] constantly identified with the political principle of *autonomy*. This shows clearly that relativizing ideas are infiltrating our Calvinistic view of the state.

*The radical difference between sphere-sovereignty and autonomy*

The principle of autonomy makes sense only when speaking of the relation of a given whole to its parts. One can speak of municipal and provincial autonomy within the (federal) state.<sup>12</sup> Municipalities and provinces are indeed parts of the state and have no other structure. But family, state, church, school and industry within the state differ radically in their respective structure. They can never be related to each other as parts to a whole. Hence, from a Christian point of view it is meaningless to speak of an autonomy of family, church, school and industry within the state. The interrelation can only be sphere-sovereignty. In the final analysis autonomy, as relative independence of the parts within the whole, depends Upon the requirements of the whole. Only the government can decide how far the limits of municipal and provincial autonomy can reach in terms of a well-functioning state. And the Power, the jurisdiction of autonomous parts can never be original or underived from the whole.

*Autonomy is proper only to parts of a whole; sphere-sovereignty does not allow for such a relation*

Quite different is the case with sphere-sovereignty. It rests solely and completely upon the structure proper to the societal relationships, founded in the temporal world-order by God's sovereign will. Societal relationships whose structures are irreducible, such as family, state, church, etc., always have an original sphere of competence, principally limited with respect to each

---

<sup>12</sup> Compare the "autonomy of local churches" with a greater church organization.

[29] other. The boundaries of sphere-sovereignty therefore can never be set one-sidedly by a certain societal relationship such as state or church. They are, independent of human arbitrariness, placed in the divine world-order. In the fullest sense they exist “by the grace of God.”

What then are these structural principles by which temporal societal relationships are intrinsically differentiated and through which is given the divine guarantee for their sphere-sovereignty?

A proper answer to this question is prerequisite for the right insight into the Christian idea of the state. For how can we gain this insight if we construe the state as totality of all societal relationships, or from the individual, mathematically conceived? How can we gain insight into the state if its inner, God-ordered law structure is negated? The various structures of temporal society and their sphere-sovereignty can be viewed only from society’s deeper root-community which is the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus’ invisible church.

*Sphere-sovereignty and antithesis go hand in hand in Kuyper*

Dr. A. Kuyper (1837-1920), called by God to lead the Calvinistic *Reveil* after Groen Van Prinsterer’s death (1876), repeatedly emphasized the laws proper to the life of societal relationships. In spite of liberalistic scorn he persistently posited an antithesis against the deadening synthesis of his time, and recognized sphere-sovereignty as fundamental cosmic principle. This connection between antithesis and sphere-sovereignty was not by chance. It is exactly the search for synthesis of scriptural and pagan or humanistic views of society that muddles the insight into the law-structure of societal relationships and sphere-sovereignty. Synthesis caused this in the past and causes it today.

*Kuyper broke with nature-grace and distinguished between church as institute and as organism*

[30] Kuyper, following Calvin, broke radically with the Scholastic and Lutheran nature-grace dualism. In his view of the relation between the Kingdom of God and temporal societal relationships Scripture broke through powerfully, and caused him to see a distinction between the church as temporal institute and as organism. He saw that the Christian idea of the state could not be Scripturally understood as long as its Christian character was considered demonstrated when the boundaries between church and state are weakened Hence his objection to article 36 of the Belgic Confession. The invisible, supra-temporal church of Christ is the center for him that must be revealed, not only in the temporal church-institute, but indiscriminately in all societal structures: in the Christian family, the Christian scientific community, etc. The church as an organism is the hypostasis, the revelation of the invisible, supra-temporal church in all societal structures equally.

This great conception opened the way for a truly Scripturally Christian view of society. In recent years it has been worked out further in deeper investigation of the various structural principles underlying the bonds of temporal society.<sup>13</sup>

*Elaboration of Kuyper's views the first meaning of sphere-sovereignty,  
the sovereign law-spheres*

If insight into these structural principles is to be gained, it is first of all necessary to obtain insight into the rich diversity of aspects manifest in temporal reality. These aspects become most clear to us when we compare our theoretical and our non-theoretical, everyday experience of things. In daily life we view a blossoming apple tree as a complete unity, an individual thing. For the various sciences however, this one thing can be

---

13 C.f. Prof. Doyeweerd 's *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, especially vol. III, Amsterdam: H. J. Paris; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1953

[31] considered from a particular point of view or in terms of a certain aspect. For mathematics only the aspects of numerality and space; for physics only the aspect of motion; for biology, organic life; for psychology only the aspect of sense-object; for logic as objective coherence of logical characteristics that we subjectively combine in the concept tree; for the historical\* as object of human culture; for the lingual as receiving a name; for economy as object of appraisal; sociology considers the tree as object in human social functioning; esthetically a tree is considered as object of artistic harmony; juridicially as object of right of ownership, etc.; ethically as object of love or hate; and theologically as object of faith. (We believe that the tree is created by God and is not a fortuitous product of blind forces of nature.)

*Temporal reality-aspects in distinct law-spheres*

Temporal reality functions in all of these aspects: in number, space, motion, organic life, feeling, logical analysis, historical formgiving, symbolic meaning (language), social manners, economic value, artistic harmony, justice, love, and faith. Furthermore, the full reality of a thing does not allow itself to be enclosed in anyone of them. For example whoever says, following materialism, that for him a tree is no more than a mass of moving matter, speaks nonsense since, by so saying, he forms for himself a sense-perception and a logical concept of this thing, and gives it symbolic meaning in words. Implicitly therefore, he recognizes that the number, space, and matter aspects are only certain sides of the real tree, and that these cannot exist without psychical feeling, logic, or language. These aspects of temporal reality cannot be reduced to each other either. Each has its own law-sphere, and is embraced in that law-sphere. Here the fundamental principle of sphere-sovereignty reveals itself in its primary sense.

---

\* The 1968 Craig Press edn has 'historial' – it has been changed throughout to 'historical' for this e-version.

*The religious root-unity of the law-spheres*

The deeper unity of all temporal reality aspects within their own spheres of divine ordinances (law-spheres) cannot be found in anyone of these aspects. It is of supra-temporal, religious character. The fullness of number, the spatial omnipresence, the fulness of force, of life, of feeling, of knowledge, of historical power, of communion, of beauty, of justice, of love, and of faith is in Christ Jesus, the Root of the reborn cosmos! In Him all these aspects of temporal reality find their true fulfillment of meaning, their deeper root-unity in the concentration upon service of God with the whole heart.

*As sunlight diffuses itself in prismatic beauty . . .*

As sunlight breaks into a marvelous diversity of rainbow hues, and as all these pure pastel paints find union in unbroken, shimmering white, so also all temporal reality aspects find their supra-temporal unity in Christ Jesus, in Whom God has given us all. All temporal aspects of created reality are in Christ Jesus, the true Root of creation, concentrated into the religious supra-temporal fulness of meaning. That is why, as Kuyper says, there is indeed no area of this life of which Christ does not say: Mine! There is no autonomous area of “nature” existing independently of Christ, above which His kingdom, a supposed “area of grace” looms as a second building level.

*Common grace and the grace of rebirth (palingenesis): no dualistic doctrine*

Nor is there a “realm of common grace” independent from a “realm” of “special grace” in Christ Jesus. The Fall turned the heart, the root of creation, away from God. Creation therefore, had to be reborn in its root through Christ. Special or saving grace can therefore not be a “separate realm.” It touches, as did the

[33] Fall, the supra-temporal *core*, the heart, the root of all temporal creation. “Common grace” does not touch this supra-temporal root, but only the temporal ordinances of life: God halts the decomposition caused by sin. But this common, merely temporal grace of God has no other root than Christ Jesus. The grace of rebirth, given to us by God in Him, is the true hidden root of common grace which must be made evident in the “church as organism,” that is, in Christian unfolding of life within all temporal structures of reality. When, by God’s common grace in this sinful temporal life, culture, learning, art, family and political life, etc., are still possible, the inescapable call comes to the Christian to make Christ, as true Root of creation, as King of all temporal life, visibly manifest. For the Christian this task makes political life also a holy Christian calling. It is true that under the rule of common grace Christ’s kingdom cannot come to unbroken realization, for the power of sin continues to turn itself against this kingdom until the last day, but fundamentally in the root of Creation the victory *has been won* by the Lamb of God, and creation, in all its structures, has been maintained, saved, redeemed!

*Sphere-universality of the law-spheres*

If we find in all temporal aspects of our cosmos, as they are enclosed in their sovereign law-spheres, their supra-temporal unity and religious fulfillment of meaning in Christ Jesus, then this deeper unity must come to expression in each of these law-spheres. The theory of the law-spheres has indeed shown that every aspect of temporal reality expresses itself in coherence with every other. This phenomenon is called sphereuniversality, the complement of sphere-sovereignty.

Here too, the analogy of the prism holds true, for in the seven colors of the spectrum every color is such that all others are mirrored in its particular tone. And as these seven colors are not indiscriminately mixed,

[34] but follow one another in a set order of wave lengths, so also the various aspects of temporal reality. They exhibit a set order of succession, from earlier to later.

*Succession of the law-spheres and the organic character of sphere-sovereignty*

It can be shown that in the temporal world-order number precedes the aspect of spatiality. The latter in turn precedes motion, then, respectively, organic life, feeling, logical thought, historical development, language, economy, art, justice, and finally, the aspect of love precedes that of faith. No single aspect of reality and thus no single sphere of temporal divine ordinances can be considered as being independent from the others or purely by itself. Here the deeper unity of the law of God comes to rich expression. Whoever violate God's law in one temporal law-sphere really violates the entire coherence of divine ordinances and in a deeper sense the religious root-unity of divine law as revealed to us through Jesus Christ. God's law is so rich and deep that in none of its temporal spheres does it allow of partial fulfillment. God's juridical ordinances cannot be repudiated without violating at the same time the norms of love, harmony, etc. The temporal world-order is a radically organic coherence even while it maintains sphere-sovereignty of the law-spheres. This coherence is already guaranteed in the sphere-universality of which we spoke earlier. Let us take as example the aspect of feeling, investigated by the science of psychology.

In this aspect, first of all, the bond with the aspects of number, space, and motion, which precede feeling in the temporal world-order, is maintained. Further, this bond with spatiality is mirrored in a sense of spaciousness and a sensory space-screen; in emotion we see the bond of feeling with the physical motion aspect of reality; in the sensuous or the sensory the bond with the organs of a living body. This connection with the earlier, preceding aspects of reality can be shown not

[35] only in human life, but also in animal life. In an animal however, this life of feeling is limited to sensory feeling, tied to number, space, motion, and biotic organism. Human sense-life, on the other hand, displays a deepening and disclosure as compared to animal life, since here the psychical aspect reveals itself as connected also with the subsequent aspects of reality. A man also has a logical, historical, lingual, economic, and esthetic sense, a jural and moral sense, and a feeling of faith. Thus the meaning of number is disclosed and deepened in its coherence with the spatial and physical reality-aspects. And sense-life bound rigidly to the psychical, when opened up to the mental feeling of logic, justice, beauty, etc., is always directed by these later aspects upon which the disclosed psychical life anticipates.

*Disclosure and deepening of the meaning of a law-sphere*

What we found with respect to feeling in temporal reality actually holds for all aspects of that reality in its order of sovereign spheres. Logical thought deepens itself from being strictly bound to sense-perception to theoretical, scientific thinking. Such opening up reveals a logical harmony of system, etc., in anticipation of the historical, the lingual, the economic and the asthetic reality-aspects. So also the meaning of retribution of the juridical aspect opens up in anticipation of the ethical. One need only compare primitive retribution, where punishment was measured in terms of external result, with the modern retribution where, under influence of Christianity, punishment is determined in accordance with the measure of guilt and responsibility!

*The second meaning of sphere-sovereignty: individuality-structures in things and in societal relationships*

The preceding brief summary of the main points of the theory of law-spheres, where the principles of



[36] sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality, are investigated, was necessary for an insight into the structural principles of the temporal societal relationships, such as the state, church, etc., in which the second meaning of sphere-sovereignty reveals itself.

In the normal experience of everyday life we never take hold of these aspects of reality in an articulated way; we do not distinguish them theoretically. Rather, these aspects are experience implicitly in concrete things, events, relationships etc. Only science distinguishes and analyzes these law-spheres. But concrete things, events, and societal forms, immediately experienced, are based upon concrete, divine structural principles, in which the various reality-aspects are grouped in their individual way. Every concrete thing, be it a tree, a horse, a table or a chair, functions on all aspects of reality. However, when we look more closely at the peculiar structural law of these things it becomes apparent that the various aspects are grouped in a different way in each of these structures.

*Concrete things function in all law-spheres indiscriminately. The significance of the typical end-function*

For example, a tree undoubtedly functions in the aspects (law-spheres) of, number, space and motion in the first law-sphere as a unity of the plurality of its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc.; in the second as a certain spatial figure; in third as a moving mass of matter. But as long as we merely look at these aspects of a tree it is as yet senseless to speak of a *tree*. Mathematics, physics and chemistry do indeed eliminate the individual thing and investigate only the external relations in number space, or motion. For them the peculiar inner structure of the thing's functioning in them is not important. The physical law of gravity is valid for a tree just as it holds for a falling stone or planetary motion in the universe.

[37] But when we shift our attention to the aspect of organic life things appear in a different light. For biologists, who study this reality-aspect, it makes eminent sense to speak of a *tree*. The, organic life function, therefore must take a very special place in the structure of a tree. This is the last aspect of reality in which the tree still functions as *subject*. In all later reality-aspects it functions only objectively, as object. The tree lives as subject, but cannot sense psychically, can only be sensed as object. The tree does not think subjectively, but can be grasped as object in a concept. It is not a jural subject, but only an object of legal possession, etc.

However, the organic function has yet another role in the, inner structure of the tree. For in this inner structure all the functions of the tree in earlier reality-aspects are typically directed toward their goal. Undoubtedly, the tree is subject to the general laws of mathematics and physics in its aspects of number, space, and motion. But in the inner structure of this thing, its functions in the three preceding law-spheres typically disclose and point to the destination of existence of the individual thing. In this inner structures no motion is purposeless. Chemical catalytic motions are typically pointed to the goal of tree-life. They are individually directed by the organic life-function.

*The first meaning of sphere-sovereignty (law-spheres) is not voided in the individuality structure of things. The thing as individual totality*

Hence we name this last function the *typical end function* of a tree, which finally qualifies the thing as a tree. Sphere-sovereignty of the various aspects has not been superseded with this. In the inner, structure of the tree also, spatial relations do not become motions, nor do they become organic life processes. Thus the laws proper to these reality-aspects are not broken. But

[38] within this framework of sovereign aspects, the individuality structure of the tree becomes apparent as individual whole. Here the various aspects are grouped in such a way that the organic life function has the role of end-function or qualifying function. The structural principle, the inner structural law cannot, therefore, be placed on equal footing with the divine laws of a given law-sphere such as number or space. It is rather a divine ordinance that overarches the distinct aspects of reality, and groups the individual totality of a thing in a peculiar way, in such a manner that a certain aspect, in this case the biotic, receives the role of leading end-function.

*The basic error of humanistic science: the attempt to dissolve the individuality structure of a thing in a schema of lawful relations within one aspect of reality*

The primary error made by humanistic science (*Wissenschaft*) was the belief that the structural principle of things could be resolved in the laws of single law-sphere. Thus it was thought that a living tree could analytically be construed completely as a complex of mechanical, material motion. The individual thing was theoretically resolved within one of its aspects (here mechanical motion), and the actual structural principle was left out of consideration.

Now, not only do the things of nature, such as a tree, or a mountain, or animal, have their divine structural principles, but things formed by human skin (technics) have them too. *In concreto*, temporal reality never exists without such individuality structures. This in turn also holds for the various forms of society.

*The individuality structure of societal relationships*

Societal bonds such as family, church, school, state, etc., are therefore also individual totalities with their

[39] own inner structure. They too, cannot be reduced to, or resolved into some aspect of reality e.g., the economic or the juridical – in principle they function in all sides of reality. They are radically distinguished from each other, however, in their inner structural principle for this determines the typical end-function of a societal bond. This end-function gives the typical direction to all the functions of a societal structure in the prior aspects. It gives this structure its peculiar stamp, its particular qualification.

Thus an industrial unit is typically qualified as economic, that is, it has an inner structural principle whereby the various aspects of its reality are grouped in such a way that the economic aspect typically leads and directs all earlier functions. So also the temporal church-institute: it is qualified as *Christian community of faith based upon a common creed*. That is to say, the inner structural principle of the church points to the faith function as the typical end-function of this relationship, which typically leads and directs all earlier functions. Likewise the family: on the strength of its divine structural principle it is qualified as a typically ethical community of love between parents and children. And finally, the state is, in accordance with its inner structural principle, a societal relationship where the role of end-function is fulfilled by the *typically juridical community of rulers and subjects*.

#### *The typical founding-function*

But the end-function alone does not yet determine inner structure of societal relationships. In all these relationships this end-function points back to another aspect of reality, where the entire structure of a given relationship is typically based or founded. Consider the end-function of the family: the typical (ethical) parent-children love community. It is immediately clear that the expression of love between parents and children finds its actual basis in the natural blood-ties, in the natural

[40] genetic relationship. Now, this genetic relationship has its temporal foundation in the aspect of organic life, the biotic aspect of reality. And the typical community of love that has the role of end-function is thus founded in this biotic, genetic relationship – the natural blood-ties. This communion of love is not the same as the comradeship that one should expect in a labor-community. It is not the same as general neighborly love, or love among compatriots. Rather, it has its *own* unique structure based upon a genetic relationship.

The peculiar structure of the family relationship then is determined by the indissoluble coherence of (1) the ethical end-function (the communion of love between parents and children) and (2) the biotic function of the genetic or blood ties on which it is founded. This latter one we will call the founding-function of this societal relationship.

In this way all societal relationships have their own end-function and their own founding-function, both determined as such by the inner structural principle.

*The structural principle of the state. The state an institution for the sake of sin. This Scriptural view not maintained by Thomas Aquinas*

What then, is the structural principle of the state? The state as societal relationship is not like the family, founded in natural blood-ties. Rather its typical founding-function is given in the historical aspect of reality - in a historical power formation, the monopolistic organization of the power of the sword over a given territory. Wherever this foundation is lacking we cannot speak of a *state*.

This typical founding-function of the state reveals immediately that it is a divine institution for the sake of sin. Thomas Aquinas, and Roman Catholic political theory following him taught that the state as such is not instituted for the sake of sin. Only the power of the sword is. The state is grounded in the nature of

[41] man and is the totality-bond of natural society. In other words, the power of the sword is, in the Roman Catholic view, not an essential part of the structure of the state. This is a falling away from the Scriptural view of the state as still strongly defended by the church-fathers, notably Augustine. This falling away is explicable in terms of the synthesis mentioned earlier – a synthesis of Christian doctrine and pagan Aristotelian theory. For, as we saw the latter taught that the state is grounded in the “rational-moral nature,” and as such is the total bond of which all “lower” relationships are never more than dependent parts.

*One-sided action for national disarmament is a neglect of the structural principle of the state*

Whenever one denies the organization of the power of the sword as typical founding-function of the state structure, one denies the structural principle proper to this societal relationship. It is then impossible to gain insight into the sphere-sovereignty of the societal structures. Thus, it is clear that all action for one-sided national disarmament results from a denial of the divine structural law for the state. Anarchistic action against the state is then the (unwanted) outcome rooted in a misapprehension of sin. The state is a typically divine institution of “common grace,” that is, the temporal, preserving (*behoudende*) grace of God. The power of the sword is not an end unto itself as modern imperialism teaches.

*The indissoluble coherence of the typical found-function and the typical end-function of the state*

In the divine structural principle of this societal relationship the power of the sword is unbreakably bound up with the typical end-function of the state, that is, the maintenance of a public jural community of rulers and subjects. All the intrinsic matters of state ought

[42] to be directed by this juridical nucleus, on the strength of the inner structural law. A state where the power of the sword becomes an end in itself degenerates into an organized band of highwaymen, as Augustine and Calvin have remarked.

A public community of law which, as end-function, qualifies the state, is utterly different from the internal jural community of other societal relationships, such as family, school, or church. In all of these the internal jural community is directed by the peculiar end-function of the relationship concerned. Internal church-order, for instance, coheres inseparably with the typical end-function of the temporal church bond as community of believers, united by a common creed, founded upon an historical organization of office. Think of church discipline, by which the purity of life and doctrine is maintained.

Only in the case of the state does the jural community *itself* function as end-function, but always founded upon territorial organization of the power of the sword. The internal community of law of the state is a community of jural government, where the government, as servant of God, does not carry the sword in vain. The government may, in accordance with the state's inner law of life, never allow itself to be led by any other point of reference than that of justice. But here is no talk of a private community of law, as in the other societal relationships, but a public one, subject to the jural principle of the common good. And exactly here, in the understanding of the principle of the common good the difference between Christian and pagan or humanistic ideas of the state becomes clearly evident.

*The "common good" (public welfare) as jural principle and as absolutistic principle of power*

For, insofar as pagan or humanistic political theory is absolutistic, it views the principle of the common good from the idea that the state is the total bond of all

[43] temporal society. Of such a state then, all other societal relationships are no more than dependent parts. From this point of view it is impossible to see “common good” as a truly *jural* principle.

As long as the relation between state and other social structurations is understood as a whole-part relation, justice cannot stand in view of the “common good.” And thus it is that out of necessity the state is granted, at least juridically, *absolute* jurisdiction and *absolute* competence. But absolute competence of authority cannot exist side by side with the very meaning of justice, for justice demands a balanced limiting and harmonizing of jurisdiction. Yet, when the state is given absolute competence, it is assumed that the state as the wellspring of positive justice is itself above the law. Thus the teaching of the well-known sixteenth century Frenchman Jean Bodin: *Princeps legibus solutus est* – the government stands above legislated law.

The modern message of the citizen without rights in relation to the state as proclaimed by National-Socialism and Fascism, is but a consequence of such thought.

*The old-liberal idea of the “Rechtsstaat” proves powerless to control the absolutism of “common good”*

The liberal idea of the *Rechtsstaat* proved inadequate and powerless over against the absolutism of common good. In its classical, individualistic dress of natural law it attempted to control absolutization by means of external restriction of the task of the state. The social contract that had supposedly inaugurated the state was intended to give the state no other task than organized safeguarding of natural, constitutional rights of the individual - life, property, and freedom.

*The humanistic idea of the “Rechtsstaat” in its second, formalistic phase*



[44] When however, historical developments confronted the state with a far broader task, and forced it to become involved with social and economic life, in culture, education, etc., this old-liberal idea too, became obsolete. Hence, it was now modified; the state is no longer limited in its task only to the protection of the rights of the individual. Many other “goals” may be striven for: furthering of culture, stimulation of economy, etc. But, the idea was that the state may only do this when remaining formally subject to administrative legislation. This new and principally modified conception gave the citizen only formal protection against the absolutism of the so-called “common good.” For after all, this protection lay only in this that the “executive” was formally subject to the law. But the law-giver himself was not curbed in any way by this formal idea of the *Rechtsstaat*. His juridical sovereignty was accepted unreservedly. With that the law-giver as such was placed above and beyond the law. Only the executive branch of government was subordinated to the legislative power.

*Only the Christian idea of the state, rooted in the principle of sphere-sovereignty, is the true idea of the “Rechtsstaat.”*

The radically Christian idea of the state, the idea that has principally broken with any absolutization of either state or individual, is the sound idea of the *Rechtsstaat*. It alone can grasp the principle of the common good as a truly *jural* principle of public law, because it is grounded in the confession of a supra-temporal root-community of humanity in the kingdom of Christ Jesus, and because it accepts therefore the principle of sphere-sovereignty for the temporal societal bonds.

To see the principle of sphere-sovereignty correctly however, we must remember that it does not impose *external* boundaries on the task of the state. The old-liberal idea of the *Rechtsstaat* did this with its demand that the government refrain completely from any in-

[45] volvement with social and economic life. But we have seen that in every societal relationship - and therefore also in the state - in principle all reality-aspects function equally in all law-spheres. It was the basic error of humanistic thought concerning the *Rechtsstaat* in its old-liberal, individualistic form to hold that the state could be understood as an abstract community of law, or rather as a simple juridical social contract, and nothing more. But the truth is that the inner structural principle of the state ought to express itself in all aspects of temporal reality equally. For the state is not merely a community of law, but also a spatial community (the country and its boundaries), a community of life, of feeling, of thought, of historical cultural form, social and moral (think of patriotism). And the Christian idea of the state demands that the structure of the state express itself also in a Christian community of faith, embracing both governors and those governed.

*The task of the state cannot be limited externally by excluding the state from certain aspects of reality.*

But the limitation of the task of the state in all these areas of life is an *intrinsic* limitation, fixed by the inner structural principle of the state. The internal economy of the state relationship cannot, as such, express itself like the structure of a private business. Neither can the internal social community within the state relationship (for instance, national festivities, public ceremonial, etc.) take on the form of the social community of a clan, or a family, or an association.

The public justice of the state finds its boundaries in the internal private communities of law of the other societal relationships. Thus also, the Christian state as such can reveal itself in the area of faith only within the boundaries of its own inner structural principle, and may not assume the structure of a church-institute. For the state is not, like the temporal church-community,

[46] qualified as a community of believers in Christ. That is to say, neither the state, nor any other non-ecclesiastical societal relationship has as its typical goal the area of faith and confession.

*The state, with its function as political faith-community, may not be subjected to an ecclesiastical creed*

For that reason the state may not be tied to a certain ecclesiastical creed, as was long the rule. Nor may the demand be made that offices in the state be held by candidates of a certain denomination, or group of denominations (e.g., Protestant or Roman Catholic). A confession concerning the task of a Christian government, such as the old article 36 in the Belgic Confession, does not belong in an ecclesiastical creed. And in the same way the Christian state as community of faith should not tie itself to a confessional creed concerning the sacraments and the preaching of the Word. The creedal basis of the Christian state in its function as community of faith can only be the confession of God's sovereignty revealed in regime of Jesus Christ, the Governor of all governments on the earth. But this political creed entails for all of state-life the recognition of the truly Scriptural basis for political life. And the heart of it all remains the confession of God's sovereignty in Christ Jesus in which is included the recognition of sphere-sovereignty of the various societal relationships.

*The Christian faith deepens the typically political principles of justice.  
The Roman and the Christian idea of justice*

These jural principles of the structure of the state, opened up and depended by Christ's universally redemptive work, ought to take the leading role in the Christian state. Undoubtedly, in a pagan state God's common grace maintains the inner structural principle, but here political life in its faith-function is without its direction

[47] towards the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. The true Root of common grace, Christ as supreme Governor, remains hidden in the pagan idea of the state – there is no visible manifestation.

For instance, classical Roman law, in spite of its admirable technical development, remained rigidly bound to an egoistical imperialistic idea of power and was without any disclosure and enrichment in the sense of a Christian idea of solidarity, in which power, love, and justice are caught up in the full sense of their religious root-unity, a unity majestically revealed to us in the cross of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Thus we find no trace of Christian social legislation in pagan Roman public law. The jural sphere of the *pater familias* (head of the Roman household), egoistically absolutized, is here in unrelenting opposition to the absolute imperialism of the *Res Publica Romana*. Over against this absolute imperialism the Roman citizen had no rights, for the state was thought of in a totalitarian sense as the whole of society. In private life, on the other hand, the egoistic spirit of Cain ruled: Am I my brother's keeper?

#### *The liberal-humanistic and the Fascistic views of justice*

In the modern humanistic view of justice one can rediscover this isolating Roman dualism of public and private law.

Old-liberal politics with its principle of exclusion raised private advantage to the highest directive of private life. And in the recent reaction against this liberalism by Fascism and National-Socialism it is true that great emphasis is placed upon common good and upon the requirements of the community of the people, also in the sphere of private law, but nevertheless, all this

---

14 By “disclosure” (*ontsluiting*) and “enrichment” (*verdieping*) Dr. Dooyeweerd calls attention respectively to the unfolding, the expression of the retrocipatory moments, and the anticipatory moments, in this case within the jural sphere.

[49] is at the cost of sphere-sovereignty and individual freedom. For here too, the old pagan idea of the state dominates – an idea teaching the state to be the totality-bond of which all others can only be dependent parts.

Only the radically Christian idea of sphere-sovereignty can keep the absolutism of “common good” in check. No other view allows us to see the true harmony among the various spheres of life, as willed by God in His creation-order. Hence it alone can reveal the truly Christian idea of the *Rechtsstaat*.

*All non-Christian theories of the state are essentially theories of power (Machtsstaats-theorieen)<sup>15</sup>*

For the Christian idea of the *Rechtsstaat* sphere-sovereignty is the cornerstone. In the final analysis all pagan and humanistic political views are indiscriminately theories of a *Machtsstaat*, because at best they can give arbitrary, but never truly principial boundaries to the task of the state. It can be understood therefore, that modern National-Socialistic and Fascistic theories of the *Machtsstaat* deny the individualistic liberal idea the right to name itself with the proud title of *idea of the Rechtsstaat*.

*The true relation of state and church: not a mechanical division, but sphere-sovereignty*

---

15 The term “*Machtsstaat*” is to be taken as the exact opposite of “*Rechtsstaatt*.” In humanism, and already in Greek thought each represents a horn of the same (false), dilemma. Broadly, the idea of the *Machtsstaat* is a view of the state as characterized historically by power (the view of the sophist Kallikles, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, Hegel, etc.), while the idea of the *Rechtsstaat* views the state as characterized by natural justice, conceived apostatically as based on natural law, inborn right, absolute standards, etc. (Plato is a good example here.) In contemporary political theory these are in dialectical opposition to each other, and are often unsuccessfully forced together. This is what Dr. Dooyeweerd sees as the crisis in humanistic political theory. For a fuller explanation of this crucial point see *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* III, Part II, chapter 3, and *De Crises in de Humanistische Staatsleer*.

[50]

The radical difference between Christian and liberal humanistic political doctrine is nowhere clearer than in their respective views of the mutual relation between state and church.

Insofar as liberalism wished to safeguard the freedom of church-life over against the state it could not do otherwise than (1) effect a watertight division between state and church, and (2) introduce the “religionless state,” where faith is completely excluded. The freedom of the church was then derived from the absolute constitutional rights of the “religious individual.” The church became a private association, and in it the “general will” of the members was declared sovereign.

Scriptural Christianity, on the other hand, can never take over this liberalistic slogan of separation of church and state without spiritual suicide. Sphere-sovereignty does not yield a watertight compartment or mechanical division among the areas of life. It is, as we have seen, an organically most deeply cohering principle, for it begins with the religious root-unity of the life-spheres.

*The inseparable, interwoven texture of the various structures of society*

The various social structures by which spheres-sovereignty is internally guaranteed do not stand alongside each other in isolation. In temporal life they are intertwined and interwoven. All other societal relationships also have a function within the state, just as conversely the state functions in all other societal relationships. But all these structural interplays remain in the final analysis of an external character with respect to sphere-sovereignty. Members of a family, a congregation, or a business enterprise are at the same time citizens. And conversely, the state is always dealing with families, churches, and business enterprises. But the competence, the sphere of jurisdiction of the state can never be expanded into the internal, structurally determined concerns that are proper to these societal

[50] relationships without thereby violating in a revolutionary way the cosmic constitution of sphere-sovereignty. Chaos rather than order and harmony is then the inevitable result.

*The prophetic task of Christianity in these times*

Thus the Christian idea of the state in its only possible, radical, Scriptural sense remains the liberating message – also, yes especially in our dynamic times. And it is to us, kindred in spirit, to take hold of this incomparably rich idea, to make it our own, to possess it spiritually as the heritage of our fathers. May we carry it everywhere – to benefit the entire community, now drastically distorted, as the only balm for its wounds.

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dooyeweerd, Herman. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957, Vol. III 379-506.

Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1931. These are the Stone Foundation lectures first delivered at Princeton University in 1898.

Runner, H. Evan. *Scriptural Religion and Political Task in Christian Perspectives* 1962. Toronto, Ontario: The Association for Reformed Scientific Studies (now under the new name of The Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship), 1962. The material is printed by Guardian Publishing Co., Ltd., Hamilton, Ontario.

Taylor, E. L. Hebden. *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics, and the State*. Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1967.