

MAN IN SOCIETY

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1 - The Christian Viewpoint

All thought about society depends on the position adopted by the human thinker for his study of society. In the final count this position will always have religious foundations, religious presuppositions that, explicitly or implicitly, are laid at the foundation of thinking about society. This state of affairs remains even when, in pursuit of a positivistic science ideal, it is denied by the thinker. A religious foundation is the inescapable prerequisite for human thought.

Science Philosophy and Religion

Nicholas S. Timasheff in "SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY - Its Nature and Growth" argues that a separation of sociology from "social philosophy" is necessary on the ground that, while "social philosophy" legitimately deals with the meaning of "reality as a whole", sociology as "empiric science" must remain agnostic about "reality as a whole". The propositions of sociology concern a specified field of enquiry and are "drawn from facts observed in that field or in closely related fields ... without assuming (neither asserting or denying) any knowledge on a level of higher abstraction concerning reality as a whole. All propositions that constitute any empiric science form a self sufficient system ... thus, whereas the sociologist explains society in terms of facts observed in society and, eventually, in related fields of empiric knowledge, the social philosopher explains society in terms of the explanation he gives to total reality." SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY (Random House 1967) p. 5.

In this way Timasheff hopes to isolate the scientific study of society from all philosophical and religious presuppositions by creating a neutral, "self sufficient", field of study where the scientific study of the "facts" will produce results of assured veracity within the prescribed limits of the field of study.

But, Timasheff cannot advance this proposition about sociology as "empiric science" except on the basis of a prior assumption about the nature of reality. His whole thesis necessarily assumes that reality is such that it is possible to isolate a section from the whole in such a way that this isolated section can be understood truly, though within limits, by scientific thought without reference to "reality as a whole". This assumption is not the product of his sociological investigation but is a philosophical presupposition that he is laying at the foundation of his sociological thought.

Suppose he is wrong about this assumption. Suppose that reality is such that no part of it can be understood except in relation to the whole. Then, of course, his whole thesis about sociological science collapses.

And his sociological science cannot help him to determine whether this basic assumption at the foundation of his science is correct, since his sociological science is founded on this assumption as the prior condition for his science; the conclusions of his science can have assured validity only if this basic assumption about reality is correct. If, in fact, that assumption is not correct, and social reality can only be understood in its relation to “reality as a whole”, then Timasheff’s attempt to understand social reality in isolation from “reality as a whole” can only lead him to a falsified view of social reality. {1}

Timasheff’s supposition, therefore, that he can isolate sociology from all philosophical presuppositions is seen to be an illusion since this very view of an isolated sociology is itself seen to be governed by philosophical presuppositions about social reality and scientific thought. Before he begins his activity as a social scientist, indeed before he even begins to construct a definition of his task, he has supposed a certain understanding of reality. All his subsequent scientific thought rests on that prior supposition.

Further, these philosophical suppositions show themselves to have a fundamentally religious foundation. They involve a conviction about the deepest roots, the absolute origin, of life. The basic assumption, the self sufficient autonomy of scientific thought, asserts the absolute sovereignty of scientific thought in place of the absolute sovereignty of the Creator in the world of scientific study. Scientific thought is not merely given a place of relative sovereignty in relation to other forms of human activity, but it is given a place of absolute sovereignty over a significant area of human knowledge. At the deepest level, Timasheff’s sociological thinking is thus seen to be founded in a religious presupposition arising from man’s rejection of the Word of God that faces him in his created life. Rejecting the absolute sovereignty of the Creator, man, in a fundamental religious choice that forms the most basic presupposition for his thought about society idolatrously elevates a creature, in this case scientific thought, to the deified status of absolute sovereign.

Timasheff may hide from the philosophical and even more fundamental religious presuppositions of his scientific thought but he cannot escape them. As a scientist engaged in the special science of sociology he can hide from the underlying religious presuppositions of his work more readily because the investigation and articulation of these presuppositions forms no part of the task of social science as such. It is entirely outside its scope as a special science even though these presuppositions are the indispensable foundation for all science. This means that it is possible for the sociologist to work as a social scientist, true to the internal principles of social science, without ever being aware of the religious presuppositions on which his work is founded.

It is when we consider the philosophical foundations of the special science of sociology that the significance of the religious presuppositions becomes apparent, and yet, even here, these often remain hidden without a truly radical criticism. For this reason, development of truly Christian social science, or any other science, demands a radical

criticism of its philosophical foundations in order to uncover the underlying religious presuppositions. Only in this way can the idolatrous religious motives be rooted out from the scientific task and replaced by a genuinely Christian driving force.

Without this radical philosophical criticism a Christian may work as a sociologist, unaware that his work is founded on religious presuppositions that are antagonistic to his Christian faith, since these presuppositions, are neither revealed by his sociological study as such, nor are they made explicit by the articulation of the philosophical foundations of that study. In such a situation the scientist, with the very best of motives and a great deal of diligence, may try to Christianise his sociology but all his efforts will be frustrated by the hidden religious presuppositions in his work. For this reason a truly Christian sociological science is impossible without a radical philosophical criticism of the foundations of sociological science.

We have examined Nicholas Timasheff as one example of a sociologist who believes that he can isolate his scientific work from all philosophical and {2} religious foundations. We have seen this to be an illusion since Timasheff's very statement of his belief in the philosophical neutrality of social science is itself based on philosophical presuppositions with a religious foundation. What we have found to be true for Timasheff will be found to hold also for every other social thinker.

A social science cannot do without a foundation in social philosophy. Every attempt to isolate the two will prove as illusory as did Timasheff's. This does not mean that social science is the mere servant of a controlling philosophy. A scientific study of society is as indispensable to the proper development of social philosophy as social philosophy is to the scientific study of society. The two are mutually dependent and can develop only in partnership.

Our concern in these papers will be with a social philosophy rather than a sociology. We will be attempting to articulate the necessary philosophical foundations for a scientific investigation of society that is authentically Christian. Since we aim for a Christian social philosophy the first thing we must do is to articulate our Christian religious presuppositions. If there is anything peculiar about this procedure it can only be in our insistence on the articulation of our religious presuppositions. As we have seen, it is not peculiar to the Christian thinker to have religious presuppositions at the foundation of his thought. This is common to all human thought since man, as the created image of God, is, at the very heart of his existence, a religious being. By articulating our religious presuppositions we are only making explicit what often lies implicit in human thought.

Our Christian religious presuppositions can only be the givens of divine revelation. However, these divine givens can function as the foundation for human thought only as they are appropriated by the human thinker. As divine givens they are above criticism. As the appropriated religious presuppositions of the human thinker they are subject to the same critical scrutiny as every human work.

To make our articulation of religious presuppositions into a dogmatic statement of infallible authority above question is to guarantee, therefore, that our thinking will be less

than Christian. Our thinking can attain a truly Christian character only as we adopt and maintain continually, a genuinely critical attitude toward our articulated religious presuppositions also. By a genuinely critical attitude we mean one that subjects all things to the judgment of the Word of God.

It is necessary to stress this since there is a common tendency to remove Christian religious presuppositions from critical scrutiny on the grounds that, to subject these to critical examination, would be to subject the givens of divine revelation to the critical judgment of human thought. This rests on a serious failure to distinguish between the divine givens and the human response to those givens. What we have in any statement of religious presuppositions can be no more than a human response, so far as it is Christian a believing response, to the givens of divine revelation. A truly Christian scientific thought, therefore, demands not only Christian religious pre-, suppositions at its foundation, but also that our articulation of the presuppositions be open to continuous critical scrutiny in the light of the givens of divine revelation.

When, therefore, we begin our enquiry into human society by stating the religious presuppositions for this enquiry, we do not offer this statement of religious presuppositions as the dogmatic foundation which all who wish to be Christian in their enquiry into society must accept without question. We offer it only as a believing response to the Word of God which must remain {3} subject to the judgment of that Word and for which we ask acceptance only as it is found to be faithful to that Word.

Creation

Basic to our Christian religious presuppositions is the biblical theme of creation. This is far more than an account of how things began. It is basic to our understanding of the way things are.

The whole universe of our experience is creation. We experience God through his Word, and neither God nor his Word belong to the creation, but even this experience of God and his Word comes to us in and through the creation. When God spoke to man it was in creaturely words. When he had this message recorded it was in a creaturely book, the Bible. When God came to live with man he came as a creature, man. It remains true, therefore, that the whole universe of our experience is creation.

But to say that it is creation means that it has no existence, no meaning, except in relation to the Creator. It is not a self sufficient universe; it exists only in relation to God, who, while revealing himself with the creation and making himself close to the creature, remains distinct from the creation. The very being of our universe is a related being, existing only in relation to its Creator.

This creaturely world of our experience is related to the Creator by the Creator's Word. This Word is the law for the creation, its ordering principle - see Psalm 147, 148. This Word of the Creator ensures the order and meaning of the creation.

We should not suppose that when men speak of an ordered universe they are always making a Christian confession, or even a statement that is consistent with our Christian

confession. We need to ask about the nature of the order they speak about. If the order spoken about is a rational order whose ordering principle is “reason” in one form or another, and not the Word of the Creator, then it is an order very different to the order of our Christian presuppositions. The law does not originate in rationality but in the righteous will of the Creator who is the Creator of rationality.

On the other hand, we cannot accept any view that sees any part of the universe of our experience as ordered by autonomous human activity. All is ordered by the Word of the Lord, and all man's work must take place within this divinely created order.

When we say that all things are ordered by the Word of the Lord we do not mean that all things are ordered by Scripture. Scripture is the Word of the Lord, his redemptive, covenant Word, in which he reveals himself to man as his covenant Lord. It alone is the Word that can redirect our lives God-ward in faith.

It is by this scriptural Word that we know that the whole creation is ordered by the Word of the Creator as its law. But this ordering Word is clearly not to be identified with the Word of Scripture. It has neither the function nor the status of Scripture in our life.

This creation ordering Word is not, like Scripture, a verbal communication to man, but the divine Word, or law, by which God sustains and governs his creation. It is not a word written in the creation but the Word God speaks to the creation as his law for the creation. We should not think of it as a communication from God that we can read out of the creation. {4}

What we experience is not a verbal communication but the response of the creature to the divine Word by which the creation is ordered. All that happens in our world, all that we ourselves do, is a response to the creation ordering Word of God.

This Word is not a capricious word liable to unpredictable change. It is the faithful Word of the faithful God. The reliable, trustworthy, dependable Word on which we may rely. This is the basis for the constancy of experience that makes the scientific task possible.

In this universe ordered by the Word of the Lord man has a unique place. He is God's trustee and manager, commissioned to care for and develop the creation in subjection to the Word of the Creator. The creation is not static. God did not freeze creation in the condition it was at the end of his six days of creating. In these six days God fashioned a living, moving world that exhibits the glory of the Creator in constant development and change, a development and change that always remains subject to the Word of the Creator.

At the beginning God gave his command to the creation to “be fruitful and multiply”, while to the creature man he added the Word to “fill the earth and subdue it” and “to cultivate the ground from which he was taken” - Genesis 1:27, 28 Genesis 3:23.

It would be quite contrary to all the teaching of Scripture to suppose that all that appeared up to the end of the sixth day of creation is alone the creation of God, so that all that has

developed in creation since that time must be put in a different, non-created, category. All that has appeared in the creation since the six days of creation, all the development that has taken place including the development that has resulted from man's activity, is nothing but the development of the one creation of God, as much subject to the Word of the Creator in its development as the work of those six days.

Man is given authority by the Creator to work with the creation, fashioning and shaping it in new ways. So we find man building houses, creating works of art, erecting factories, making roads, constructing bridges, fashioning clothes, devising means of transport, and in many other ways shaping new things out of the creation. In doing all this man does not add anything to the creation of God. He can only shape and fashion the creation he is given according to the ordinances of the Creator. He cannot shape the creation any way he pleases. He is bound by the Creator's ordinance by which God continually rules and governs his creation.

Our Christian understanding of creation, then, leads us to see the world of our experience as a dynamic, developing, creation, ordered by the Word of the Creator as its law and focused in and led by the community of man as the created trustee and manager for this developing creation.

The Fall

Just as basic to our Christian religious presuppositions as creation is the theme of the fall. The creation as we now experience it is a fallen creation, fallen through man's sin.

It is not a creation that is moving steadily upward to perfection from an original state of imperfection. It is not a creation in which man is bringing order out of an original chaos. The imperfection, weakness, and evil, that we experience in the creation are not "natural" to it. Man has not been placed in a world that he must struggle to perfect. {5}

Man is in a world that was very good when it was delivered into his hands by the Creator. Nothing that has happened since has altered this goodness. The whole universe of man's experience, as the creation of God, is good.

But man, the Creator's trustee and manager of this good creation, has rebelled against the Word of the Creator. He has made a unilateral declaration of independence. He has rejected the Word of the Creator as the ordering principle for the creation including his own life. This rebellion of man has perverted the whole earthly creation.

The consequences of the fall into sin are more than superficial; they are radical, affecting in the most fundamental way the very roots of life. The roots of life are corrupted with the result that the whole of life is withered. As the creation exists only in relation to the Creator, so the falsifying of that relationship in the human heart means a falsifying of all of creaturely life. Every creaturely relationship is disturbed because, in his creaturely activity man falsely redirects the creation away from the Creator and turns it in on itself.

But, as well as seeing the truly radical nature of sin, it is also important that we recognise what sin is not. Sin is not another creative power alongside the creative power of God. Sin

is the rebellion of the creature against the Creator. Sin does not endow the creature with the powers or authority of the Creator; it does not transform the creature into a rival to the Creator. The sinner, in his rebellion, would like to be such a rival, but he never can be. He remains a creature under the law of the Creator.

Man, as a sinner, remains subject to the Creator even while he refuses to submit to the Creator. He is a creature under God always. He can create nothing. He can only form and shape the creation of God in subjection to the ordinance of God by which God orders his creation. Man can build nothing except in subjection to the ordinance of the Creator.

In his sin man ignores God's Word in his working with the creation. But man's rejection of God's Word - does not nullify God's Word. It nullifies man's work. Sin does not make the ordinance of God ineffective. It makes man's work ineffective as it comes against God's ordinance. Sin does not frustrate God's will for the creation. It frustrates man's plan for the creation.

Redemption

Just as it would distort our Christian view of the world if we were to take the creation theme and ignore the theme of the fall, so it will distort our world view if we take the theme of the fall without the theme of redemption. Where sin is present, however strong it may be, the grace of God's redemption is always more powerfully present.

Our Christian religious presuppositions require a dynamic view of creation; a static view will not do. They require also a radical view of the fall; no sort of dualistic view will do. In the same way, we must have a view of redemption that is both radical and cosmic; an individualistic, ethical view of redemption will not do.

God, the Creator, has not abandoned his creation to man's sin. He has not left it to perish under the abuse of the rebel creature, man. In Christ, he has redeemed the fallen creation, rescued it, restored it, renewing its relation to himself in a life-giving covenant of his grace ratified in the death of his Son. {6}

This redemption is first of all a redemption of man, creating a new community of man in Christ in place of the old fallen community of man in Adam. Each individual human person who belongs to this new community of man in Christ experiences this redemption as the renewal of his heart, the inner core of his existence. From this heart renewal the whole life is redirected in love to God, not as an isolated individual, but as a member of the new humanity, the new community in Christ.

Man cannot be separated from the rest of the earthly creation without destroying his humanity. Man is made to be the ruler and subduer of the earthly creation, the image of God to whom the whole earthly creation is bound in covenant. So the redemption of man is the redemption of the whole earthly creation. God does not throw away what he has made; he redeems it. Not only man, but the whole earthly creation is redeemed by the redemption of God in Christ. Redemption is both radical, touching the very roots of life in the human heart, and cosmic, touching the furthestmost bounds of the earthly creation.

This radical and cosmic redemption appears in the world as the Kingdom of God. When Christ the redeemer came into the world the Kingdom of God came into the world; the divine rule of redemption by which all things are rescued from the service of idols and restored to the service of God.

This kingdom did not go out of the world when the man Jesus left the world. It remains in the world, working like leaven in the world through the new community in Christ. Though Christ is no longer in the world as the man Jesus of Nazareth, he is in the world in and through the community of redeemed mankind, and in and through this community he is working by his Spirit in the world. In and through this community the kingdom of God remains here.

The redeemed community of man is called to live as the community of the kingdom in the world, showing in its words and its deeds the redemption of Christ the Head. This can mean nothing less than the proclamation, in deed as well as in word, that, in the whole earthly creation Christ is Lord. To be faithful to this calling we cannot confine our confession of Christ's present dominion to an ethical or "religious" dimension of life. Neither can we confine that confession to the area of ecclesiastical affairs and personal ethics. We must proclaim, in both word and deed, that in every dimension and every area of life, Christ is king and his Word is law.

We may not lawfully abandon anything in creation to the reign of sin. We must dispute the claims of rebellion throughout the whole creation and never, at any point, concede to those claims as though they had even a temporary validity. In the light of the redemption of Christ, every claim for dominion made by the forces of rebellion at any point in the creation is a false claim. Our witness for the kingdom of God, therefore, will always mean a ceaseless struggle against the powers of rebellion.

We should not suppose that this struggle against the powers of rebellion is to be seen in terms of a struggle between believers and unbelievers amongst men. It is not so simple as that. By God's grace, the rebellious may serve the cause of the kingdom of God at times, and the principle of sin is not yet eradicated from the community of the redeemed. We must struggle with sin and rebellion within that community as well as without, and that means, also, within each one of us as individual members of that community.

There can be no assumption that the cause of the kingdom of God is being served wherever sincere Christian people act with sincere intention to serve the Lord. We, too, can be led by sinful, rebellious principles. {7}

If we are to serve the kingdom of God faithfully and well, we must always remain alert to the threat of rebellious principles that will drive our work in a false direction. We must continually examine critically the very foundations of our thought and actions in the light of the Word of God so that our lives, and all that we do, may be constantly redirected in love to God.

We can engage in this struggle with joy and hope because we know that the outcome of the struggle is sure. Through our faithful words and deeds, and in spite of our faithless

words and deeds, the kingdom of God will overcome all the kingdoms of this world. Of that we are certain. We are certain also that the outcome does not depend on our faithfulness, but on the faithfulness of our Lord and King. Knowing this transforms our struggles against the constant threat of sin, into a joyful, liberated struggle of confidence and hope in our king. It is not a struggle for our sake to ensure our safety and security. It is a struggle for the sake of our Lord. We go into battle, not for our own gain, because we can gain nothing more than we have already been given by our Lord, but as an act of love and devotion to our redeemer who has given us everything by his grace.

Implications For Human Society

In human society we encounter the creation of God as it has been shaped and formed by man in response to God's commission to subdue and to cultivate the creation. There is human shaping and forming in society, but this shaping and forming is subject to the Word of the Creator by which he orders all his creation. Man is not autonomous in his shaping of his society.

In the light of redemption, since human society is the creation of God, we should not abandon it, but proclaim the Lordship of Christ over all of it. It is not only in some sections of society, e.g. family and ecclesiastical structures, that the kingdom of God is to be seen through the words and deeds of the redeemed community, but throughout the whole of human society. There is no area of society where the Christian should avoid involvement, and no area where the Christian involvement should not have a specifically Christian, reforming, character. All society in all its structures, belongs to Christ the Lord, and it is our calling to proclaim his kingdom as the kingdom of redemption that has come to dispossess the idols and the powers of evil throughout the whole of human society.

As the creation of God, human society is subject to the ordering Word of the Creator as its law. In our study of society, therefore, we will expect that, underlying all the structures of society, there is a creational law, an ordering principle, fixed by the will of the Creator. At the same time as the formation of man we will expect to find the distortion of sin in human society, not merely in the way men individually and corporately behave in society, but in the very way man forms his society, and shapes its structures.

It will be our task in connection with human society, as the children of the kingdom called to proclaim the Word of redemption, not only to call men to personal behaviour in accordance with the ethical principles of God's Word, but to the forming and the reforming of the structures of society in accordance with the creation ordering Word of God enlightened always by God's Word communicated verbally to man in the Scriptures.

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2 - Fundamental Questions About Society

What is the relationship between man and society? Although this is a question that closely concerns each one of us, it is not often discussed outside theoretical sociology. People

continually take actions that affect society, campaigning for the “reform” of society or for the defence of the social status quo, without ever asking the most fundamental questions about the object of their actions. Christians also do this.

The failure to examine fundamental questions of this sort in the light of our Christian religious presuppositions is a major cause of the differences that exist among Christians on social and political issues. Although we do not, and possibly cannot, articulate answers to these fundamental questions, every action we take in relation to society must imply some sort of answer to these questions. If we do not take the trouble to examine the issues involved critically in the light of our Christian faith we will find ourselves directed in our thinking and acting about society by one or the other of the idolatrous principles that govern apostate human thought.

Because of this situation Christians are unable to reach agreement on social and political issues as such. They must remain content to agree on some broad ethical principles that are to be observed in social and political activities - and even here the agreement is becoming less and less - but, on the social and political issues themselves, Christians are constantly fighting each other.

It will not do for us to pretend that such a situation is normal. We cannot agree with a Christian involved in Australian politics who wrote recently that “there is no single Christian point of view on politics”. To adopt this position would be to deny our most central Christian presuppositions concerning the kingdom of God and the unity of the whole creation in the new humanity in Christ.

It is factually true that there is no single point of view on political or social issues among today's Christians. But we cannot conclude from the mere existence of conflicting points of view among Christians, that several Christian points of view are possible. The existence of these conflicts amongst Christians is due to the influence of idolatrous thought among Christians, “the monster-marriage of Christianity with the movements of the age, which arise from the spirit of this world”. (The Christian Idea of the State, Herman Dooyeweerd, p. 4).

There can be only one genuinely Christian view of society. To say otherwise would be to deny the unity of all things in Christ and to make a sham of the idea of Christian unity as the spiritual unity of one body under one head. The disunity of thought about society that does exist among Christians can never be regarded as a normal situation but can only be attributed to the apostasy of thought that invades the Christian community also.

This does not mean that any of us can say: “We have the Christian view on society so that all who differ with us reveal, by the very fact that they differ with our view, that they have accepted apostate principles of thought.” The threat of idolatrous thought is always present for all of us, without exception. The task of throwing out the idols from our thought can never end. In this age we do not arrive but are always pressing on toward the goal. A genuinely {9} Christian view of society will always be one open to critical review and reformation in the light of the Word of God.

If, however, we turn a blind eye to the threat of idolatrous principles in our thought, so that we neglect continuing critical examination of the very foundations of our thought, we shall not escape becoming less and less Christian in our thinking about society. A Christian view of society that is worthy of the name Christian can only arise as we labour to identify the alien, idolatrous, religious principles that have intruded into the thinking of the Christian community, and, having identified these intrusions, cast them out of our thought. We can only do that as we make a critical examination of such questions as the relationship of man to society in the light of clearly articulated religious presuppositions. Without such a critical examination of fundamental questions we can never attain genuinely Christian thought about society, and therefore, can never attain authentically Christian action in society, but must go on dissipating our energies in the faction fights of humanistic secularism.

Individualism and Universalism

Two main streams of thought appear in discussions on the relation of man and society that very quickly divide men, including Christian men, into two hostile camps. One, the individualistic stream, sees the individual human person as the basic unit of society with all the various structures of society being seen as associations of these individuals; on this view, society is defined in terms of the free individual person. The other, the universalistic stream, takes its starting point in a universal human community, so that the individual is defined in terms of this universal human community.

These two streams of thought underlie much of the political debate in Australia. Although the sharpness of the issue has been blurred by an opportunistic pragmatism on both sides together with conflicting side issues about administrative competence and ethical integrity, the heat generated by the debate over the three years of the Whitlam Labour Government (1973-5) is in large measure due to the existence of the two conflicting views of man and society.

The socialistic basis of Labour orients it toward a universalistic view of society. It tends to qualify man as member of a community of man which, nationally, has its most comprehensive expression in the State. Consequently, there is a great emphasis on developing community projects, community action, community welfare, all guided and assisted by the State.

On the other hand, the Liberal-Country Party coalition strongly influenced by an individualist view of society, sees a serious threat to society in all this communalism. So, in its sweep back into power it has placed heavy stress on the restoration of responsibility and initiative to the individual person. It exhibits a great confidence that this restoration of the free individual person will restore health to society.

It is sad to see Christians lined up on each side of this debate. In saying this, I am not passing judgment on Christians who earnestly endeavour to serve their Lord in politics by participating in one or another of the existing political parties. I am not suggesting that they are wrong to do this. What is tragic is that, whether formally associated with political parties or not, Christians become identified with one side or the other in the debate over individualistic or universalistic (communalistic) views of society, since both these views

are rooted in an idolatrous religious principle. Both turn human life equally away from the service of the Lord. {10}

Individualism denies the religious unity of mankind that is so basic to our Christian confession. Man is not just a mass of autonomous individuals who merely come together to act in community as the demands of the occasion dictate. Mankind is created one in Adam, in Adam has fallen into the kingdom of rebellion, and is redeemed for the kingdom of God as one body in Christ, the new humanity regenerated by the Spirit. As soon as we adopt any view of man that atomises him into a collection of self contained individual units we have falsified man in our thought.

But our rejection of individualism does not mean that we can support the communalism that is opposed to it in contemporary thought since the community that is advocated in this communalism is not the real transcendent community in Christ in which alone man's unity is found, but is an idolatrous creaturely community of man. It tries to identify the community in which man is united within a creation shut off from its Creator. Some find this community in a supposed brotherhood of man while others find it in one or another of the creaturely societal structures, e.g. the State. In either case, the true unity of man, which is always a transcendent religious unity rooted in man's relation to God, is replaced by a falsified immanent religious unity which attempts to found itself within the creation itself.

The only absolute, fixed point for the creation is to be found in God the Creator and his Word by which he binds the creation to himself. All creation exists only in relation to God. Both individualism and universalism equally deny this situation by making absolute some aspect of the creation. In individualism it is the individual human person who is absolutized. In universalism either humanity itself or one of the creaturely structures of society is absolutized. A genuinely Christian view of society, therefore, can not be founded on either of these, nor can it be built by any sort of synthesis or balance between the two.

The true community of mankind in which the unity of society is to be found, can only be found in the new community of man in Christ. The unity of society is found only in the religious unity rooted in the heart of man that is directed by the Spirit through the redemption of Christ in love to God. This redeemed community, in which man's unity is founded, is a community that transcends every earthly creaturely relationship. Its focus of unity is in Christ, the Son in whom all things throughout the creation hold together. Only in this transcendent community can we find the true coherence of human society. Every individual human person and every societal structure is called to be an expression of this transcendent community of man in Christ.

Our Christian view of society, therefore, will see society as a complex of interlocking individualities in which God wills to manifest the one community of man redeemed in Christ. None of these individualities is the kingdom of God, but in each one, existing as it does in inseparable relation to all the rest, the kingdom is to be displayed.

This situation is not altered because of man's failure to acknowledge it in his forming of society. Man, in his rebellion, continually attempts to turn society to the service of idols, but man's rebellion does not alter God's will that the whole creation, including the whole

of human society, shall glorify him through Jesus Christ. As Christians we may not assent to the common denial of Christ's claims over human society as called to serve Christ in his kingdom. Any such assent would be treason to our King. We must continually affirm that human society can only exhibit its true character as it is a manifestation, throughout all its complex interlocking individualities, of the kingdom of God that has come with the coming of Christ the Redeemer into the world.

It is just the failure of man, in his forming of society, to acknowledge its {11} transcendent religious unity in Christ, that prevents the attainment of any real unity in society, leaving society in the state of constant tension and division which we experience.

This complex of societal individualities of which society is composed, includes both the personal individualities of the human persons and also the various communal individualities, such as church, state, family, marriage, school, trade union, etc. There can properly be no tension between the individual persons and the communal individualities of society. Neither can there be any tension between state and church. No one societal individuality has precedence or supremacy over any other. No one can claim to be the societal whole to which all others must relate as parts. It is neither true to say that the individual human person exists to serve the communal whole, nor that the communal whole exists to protect the rights of the individual human person. Any such absolutizing of the societal creature is illegitimate. Any Christian understanding of society must refuse either, in universalistic fashion, the subordination of the individual human person to collective humanity, or, in individualistic fashion, the subordination of the communal structures of society to the individual human person.

Neither the individual human person nor any earthly community can be the central reference point in which human life finds its unity. It is neither true to say that all communal relationships are based on the individual person, nor that the individual person exists only as member of an earthly community. Both the individual person and the various earthly human communities are earthly manifestations of the one community of the new humanity in Christ as its Head. Only in this transcendent community of Christ's body is the unity of human life to be found and the integrity of both the individual person and the various earthly communities-guaranteed.

Divine Law and Positive Norm

Another tension in which Christians often become involved, but which also is rooted in an idolatrous principle, concerns the status of societal norms. On the one hand are those who want to speak of established norms for society that remain fixed for all time; these see anything less than this as involving an inevitable plunge into a shoreless relativism. On the other hand are those who see societal norms as nothing more than human conventions that can freely change without restraint from any law outside the common will of man in society.

This tension arises from the attempt to find the absolutes for society within the creation even though it may sometimes take on the deceptive appearance of a conflict between those who want to see human life as subject to "objective" law outside man himself, and those on the other hand who want to make man the only law-maker for his own life. When

we look more closely, however, we find that this is indeed a deceptive appearance.

Both, in fact, attempt to find the absolutes for society within the creation. The first want to make the law formed by the human creature, the positive norm for society formed by man into an absolute, fixed point for human society. The second wants to find this absolute, fixed point, in the law giving human person.

Before Christians are seduced into accepting the first approach as consistent with their Christian view of the world they should pause to examine more closely the “objective” foundation on which it is proposed to rest the societal norms. When we do this, we find that the “objective” foundation rests not in the transcendent law of God, but in the positivizing activity of man in the past {12} which is elevated to the status of absolute for the present. In this way, no less than in the second approach, the norms for society are founded idolatrously within the creation.

Recent debate over the Family Law Bill in Australia provides a good example of this. In opposing the bill The Foundation for the Family issued a document by F. J. Gormly Q.C. in which he argued that the bill would make “fundamental” and “profound” changes to “the nature of marriage” which, in turn, would inevitably mean “profound change” to the whole structure of society. His whole argument against the bill was based on this claim that it would affect the most profound and fundamental changes in the very nature of society.

But, in the first place, this can be a valid argument against the bill only if we first assume that profound and fundamental change in society is necessarily undesirable. We can make that assumption only by supposing that the way in which man in the past has formed society is the way in which society ought to have been formed then, and in which it ought to continue to be formed in the future.

Gormly goes on to cite two ways in which he claims that the bill will change the nature of society by changing the nature of marriage in a profound and fundamental way. One of these is that the bill would change the legal situation in which “a husband has a duty to support his wife; a wife has no legal duty to support her husband”. In other words, the bill proposes, instead of a one way obligation of support between husband and wife, that there should be recognition of a mutual obligation of support according to the capacity of each partner.

Gormly obviously regards this “profound” change as an attack on the fundamental norm of marriage, but in support of this view he can only appeal to the fact that society has “so far accepted” this concept of support within marriage. The norm to which he appeals rests on is nothing more than the established law of society.

Of course, if pressed, Gormly would no doubt want to argue that this established social norm rests on some sort of divine law, but he has not attempted to show any such connection. It would be interesting to see him try! Even if he could show such a connection his argument would only be valid if he could show that the connection is of such a nature that the established social norm is identical with the divine law governing

the obligations of support between the two partners of a marriage.

This illustrates very well the sort of conflict that continually arises in human thought over the status of societal norms. Continually there is debate as to whether these norms are fixed laws that should remain constant from generation to generation, or whether they are simply conventions established by custom, and so subject to constant change,

We will not get very far in developing a Christian view of society if we become involved as participants in this debate, or, if we join those humanistic thinkers who try to become peacemakers and find some compromise middle way between the two contending parties. The conflict is really a faction fight within humanistic thought arising from the tension between the opposing nature and freedom poles of that thought. The “fixed law” advocates gather around the nature pole, while the “social convention” forces gather around the freedom pole. Having rejected the Christian understanding of the radical unity of life in Christ, and having turned to look within the creation for the deepest foundations of its thought, humanistic thought cannot avoid being entangled in these futile tensions and debates. There is no unity to be found for human life and thought within the creation. To become involved in this debate, therefore, can only frustrate all our efforts to be truly Christian in {13} our thinking about society.

We must take another way directed by our Christian religious presuppositions. As the creation of God, human society is subject to the creation-ordering Word of God as its law. This law may never be identified with any human formulation, but remains always the transcendent divine law that judges every human word and work.

As creation-ordering Word of God this law is not revealed to man as a verbal communication. Nowhere is it written down in a book. But this does not mean that it is not revealed, or that it is revealed only in a vague and indistinct way. It is revealed clearly in the way the creation functions under the law of God's Word - see Romans 1. It is discerned by man in the same way as the “laws of nature” are discerned, by studying the way the creation functions under this law.

We will not find this creation-ordering law for society given to us in the Scriptures any more than we will find from the Scriptures the laws for physics or mathematics. We must discern the creation-ordering law for society by a study of creation just as we must discern the physical and the mathematical laws from a study of the creation. This does not mean that Scripture is irrelevant for our discernment of the creation-ordering law for society. As the redemptive, covenant Word of God that alone opens our eyes to the truth, the light of Scripture is indispensable in our study of the creation if we are to see the creation as it truly is.

We must very carefully distinguish between the creation-ordering law of God and our formulations resulting from our discernment of the operation of that law in the creation. We can only make our formulation because there is a creation-ordering law of God to which we respond, but it would be a serious mistake to identify our formulations with God's law for the creation. The one is divine law, immutable, while the other is human response to the divine law which must be open to continual review as a result of further

study of the creation.

The response that we are called to make to the creation-ordering Word for human society not only means the discernment and articulation of that law, but it also requires that we give positive form to that law as concrete norms for society. Only as the creation-ordering law is positivized in this way as positive norms, concrete rules and laws, does it function as norm in society. It is not given by God as a set of positive rules or commands, but as normative principles in response to which man, in his God-given formative activity in the creation, must formulate the positive rules, or laws, for society.

So, for example, when the state makes laws that regulate marriage, it is forming positive legal norms in response to the creation-ordering Word of God. These positive legal norms must not be identified with the creational law of God, as is done when they are raised to the status of unchallengeable and unchangeable absolutes, but neither can they be formed as positive norms in any other way than in response to the creational law of God.

In a similar way, the idea of the husband as the bread-winner in the marriage union is a positive social norm formed by man in response to the creational law. Also, the rules for the ordination of ministers in a particular church institution are positive ecclesiastical norms formed by man in response to the creational law. In none of these cases should the positive norms be identified with the law of God by raising them to the status of a fixed, unalterable, law. Not even the positive ethical norms should be given this status as moral absolutes. On the other hand, man can never form the positive norm except in response to the creational law. {15}

The true relationship between positive norm and divinely given law is not that of identity but of response. The positive norm is man's response to the divine law. The constant, absolute point of reference for human activity can be nothing else than the divine law. The positive norm formed by man in response to this law not only may change, but must change, in order to remain a faithful response to the divine law. In a creation that is not static, but is a dynamic, developing creation, the positive norms that man forms in response to the divine law cannot remain an obedient response to that law if they become static. They must be continually renewed and re-formed in order to give faithful expression to the normative principles of the divine law in a continually changing world.

Consider, for example, the question of the positive social norm governing the responsibilities for support between the two partners in a marriage. In a society, such as has existed in the past, where the woman either totally lacked the opportunities for bread-winning, or was greatly disadvantaged in those activities, it was an appropriate, obedient response to the normative principles for marriage that the husband should be expected to be the bread-winner and to support his wife in this way. It was also appropriate that the wife should not be placed under this sort of obligation. However, in the greatly changed, and changing, social situation of our day, with greatly expanded opportunities for bread-winning on the part of women, rapidly approaching the situation where men and women are on an equal footing in this respect; it would be disobedience to the normative principles of marriage, which clearly indicate marriage as a mutual partnership of two people pledged to strengthen and support each other according to the gifts and abilities

that each has, if the positive social norm was not changed.

Pausing to review for a moment, we must make two distinctions. We must distinguish between the creation-ordering Word of God to which all creation is subject as its law, and man's discernment and articulation of this creation-ordering law. We must further distinguish between both of these and the positive norms for society that man forms in response to the creational law as he discerns it in his experience of the creation. Yet, while it is important to make these distinctions, it is equally important that we do not separate what we are distinguishing. Man, in his study of the creation, cannot make laws for the creation. He can only discern the creational law given and maintained by the Creator. The positive norms of human formation, while they are not to be identified with the law of God for his creation, cannot be formed by man except in response to that law.

The fatal mistake in F. J. Gormly's approach to the Family Law Bill which we have discussed is his failure to distinguish clearly between the positive norms of human formation and the normative principles to which these norms are responding. We can share with him his concern for a fixed and unchanging point of reference for man's social ordering. However, when he wishes us to identify that fixed point of reference with any part of the positive norms of human formation, we must part company with him. We must judge it to be an idolatrous elevation of the creaturely word to the status of the Word of God.

Before concluding our discussion of the relationship between the positive norms of society and the creational Word of God, we must consider the question of man's disobedient response to the Word of God. The creation-ordering law of God as it governs man's formative activity in society, does not function determinatively. It does not determine what must happen. Rather, it functions normatively, fixing those principles that must be observed if society is to develop as a normal, healthy, society. This normative character of God's law as it relates to man's formative activity in society opens the ever present possibility for man to form society in defiance of God's law. Man's response {15} as seen in his positive norm making, can be a disobedient response as well as an obedient response. A disobedient response will lead to abnormality, discord, and malfunctioning in society, but it is nevertheless a real possibility, and, in a sinful world, not only a possibility but an ever present actuality.

Total disobedience in man's response in the forming of society could only lead to the total destruction of society. However, in this present age the grace of God that is over all human work ensures that man's disobedience never becomes a total disobedience. Disobedience is always present, in greater or lesser measure, in all man's responses to the law of God, but it never takes over completely.

This presence of disobedient response in man's positive norm making is a further reason why it is highly dangerous to identify positive norm with the normative principles of God's law. The positive norms can be formed only in response to the divine law, but they are never free of some element, greater or lesser, of disobedience in the response. Here also is a further important reason for constant review and reformation of the positive norms.

The Norms for Societal Structures

Our discussion of the relation between the creation-ordering law of God and the positive social norms is important for our consideration of the various structures of society. Here, too, we must distinguish between the normative structural principles of the creational law and the positive structural form that appear in the various societal structures. The positive structural form is not possible without the normative structural principle, and yet the two should not be identified.

For example, the positive form that a particular state has, as expressed say in its constitution, is a human positivization of the normative, God-given structural principles for the state, without which the state cannot exist, but this positive form is not to be identified with the fundamental structure of the state. Or, the positive form that the family may be observed to have in a certain society is the particular way in which man has positivized the normative structural principles for the family at a particular time, and cannot be identified with the God-given normative structure for the family. The positive social forms which the various societal structures exhibit at any given time are never anything other than the structural positivizations of the normative structural principles of the creational law.

Here, as in every other matter, it is true that man cannot shape the structure of society any way he will. He is bound to the creational law in this also. Yet, here also, the shape and form of society is not given by the creational law. The particular shape and form that society has at any given moment is given by the human response to the creational law.

The shape that society will have at any given time is not determined by the determinative divine will, nor is it the produce of the autonomous will of man. Society is only shaped by the constant interaction of the divine and human wills in terms of divine law and human response. The divine will does not determine the human response in a deterministic fashion, but, at the same time, the human activity in shaping society can only be a response to the divine law. It cannot break with that law in order to be its own autonomous law-maker setting up another law. {16}

In Summary

(i) Human society is a complex of interlocking individualities, personal and communal, the unity and coherence of which cannot be found within society, but only in the transcendent community of the new humanity in Christ.

(ii) God has willed that his kingdom, which is his redemptive dominion restoring his fallen creation to fellowship with himself, should be manifested in the whole complex of interlocking societal individualities. When man in sin denies this in his societal activity he denies the truth.

(iii) Neither the individual person nor any earthly community can properly claim precedence over other societal individualities, or subordinate others to its' own existence. All are subject alike to Christ as Lord. Social individualism and social universalism,

therefore, both alike deny the truth.

(iv) Man's-forming and shaping of society is neither determined nor autonomous, but is characterised by a law-response relationship in which man, as the created image of God, responds, obediently or disobediently, to the law of his Creator in all he does. He is not autonomous because he cannot act except in response to the divine law; he is not determined because his response has the possibility of disobedience as well as obedience.

(v) It is necessary to distinguish between:

- (a) the creation-ordering Word of God, which is the unalterable law for the creation, founded in the wise and righteous will of God,
- (b) man's always fallible, and now sinful, discernment and articulation of that creational law, and
- (c) the positive norms for society that man must form in response to that creational law.

Yet, important as this distinction is, it is equally important that we do not set these three apart. God's law does not function in man's societal activity except as it is given form in positive norms by man in the light of his discernment and articulation of the creational law, and, on the other hand, there can be no articulation and positivization except in response to the creational law of God. {17}

3 - The Structures of Society

We have seen that human society is a complex of interlocking individualities, both personal and communal, finding its unity and coherence only in the transcendent community of the new humanity in Christ. None of these individualities is to be regarded as the societal whole of which the others are the parts, or as the basic societal unit on which the others are built. Any attempt to find the unity of society in this way must prove a dead end, the sort of dead end that has led, historically, to the tyranny of state or church, on the one hand, and the disintegration of society, on the other hand. Any society that, ignoring its true unity in the transcendent community of the new humanity in Christ, attempts to find its coherence within itself, will experience the tension from the constant threat of tyranny on the one hand and disintegration on the other.

It has been a grave error that Christians, recognising correctly that the redemptive dominion of Christ extends to the whole of human life, have so often supposed that he must exercise this dominion through the particular societal individuality that we call church.

It is true that the transcendent community of Christ's body is manifested in earthly life in a specific and unique way in the societal individuality that we call church. The relationship between the church, as an earthly community of human society, and the transcendent body of Christ, is unique. The church, and the church alone, among all earthly communities is characterised by the communal confession of faith in Christ as Lord. Other societal

communities may have such a communal confession of faith, but the church must have such a confession in order to exist as church.

In other words, the uniqueness of the church among the societal individualities is seen in that it cannot exist except as a witness to Christ the Lord. If it ceases to point men, in an explicit and open way by its confession, to the transcendent community of the new humanity in Christ, it ceases to be a church.

On the other hand, all other societal communities will retain their distinctive character even though they deny the faith of Christ, and, in apostasy, direct men's lives away from Christ the Lord to idols. So, for example, an apostate state retains the character of state, an apostate family retains the character of family, an apostate marriage retains the character of marriage, but an apostate church, that has wholly fallen away from the faith of Christ, is no church at all. It is a mere fiction when such a body is called church.

But this special connection that the earthly community of the church has with the transcendent community of Christ's body should not lead us to erroneously identify the two. A connection, even a unique connection, is not the same thing as identity. The transcendent community of Christ's body includes in its membership none but those regenerated by the Spirit; the earthly community of the church includes both regenerate and unregenerate in its membership, and this remains so however hard it may try to avoid the inclusion of the unregenerate. The transcendent community is inviolate and indestructible - "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" - and is faultless - "having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing"; the earthly community can be overthrown, destroyed, apostatised, and is full of imperfection, flaws, and failures. {18}

While the kingdom of God, therefore, is manifested on earth in a unique way by the societal church community, this earthly community can neither exhaust the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God, nor can it make any claim to being the exclusive agent through which the kingdom of God is to manifest itself in human society. Such an exclusive agency could be established only if we could identify this earthly community with the transcendent community of Christ's body. This we have just seen that we cannot do. Christ exercises his dominion over the whole of human life immediately by his Word, and not mediately through the earthly church institution or any other agency of human society. Any truly Christian action in society that will reveal Christ's glory within society must recognise this.

Some Significant Distinctions

At this stage we need to take notice of some significant distinctions among the societal individualities.

We have referred already to the distinction between personal individualities, represented by the individual human persons in society, and communal individualities, represented by the various societal communities, such as family, state, church, school, sporting club, etc.

Among the communal individualities we must further distinguish between natural and organised communities. The natural communities are those that are founded in the biotic

aspect of creation and do not depend in any way on historical development for their existence. Marriage and family are communities of this kind. The organised communities are those that are founded in the historical aspect of creation, depending for their existence on historical power formation. The state, the church, a social club, are examples of organised communities.

In their positive forms the organised communities always need some sort of constitution in which their organisational structure is defined. Natural communities not only do not need any such constitution, but its introduction would threaten the very character of such a community. This is not to say that the natural communities are unstructured any more than their foundation in the biotic rather than the historical aspect of creation means that they do not need any human positivisation in the course of historical development. It is only saying that the inner structure of these natural communities is not founded in historical power formation as is the case with the organised communities.

Within the organised communities we must further distinguish between undifferentiated and differentiated communities. An undifferentiated community is one in which a number of distinct societal structures are combined within the complex structure of a single organised community. The undifferentiated community is always associated with an early stage of cultural development. An example of such a community is found in the patriarchal community such as we see in the Old Testament in the times of Abraham. This community is not to be seen as a family, even though it is closely bound to the family, but as an undifferentiated societal community which combines in one communal organisation the societal structures that, when differentiated, will appear as state, cultus, business enterprise, etc.

A differentiated community occurs when a specific societal structure, in the course of historical development, is disentangled from the undifferentiated relationships so that it is given a distinct and separate positive form in society. In the undifferentiated condition of society these specific societal structures are already present but they appear, in the positive {19} formation of society, merged in the one undifferentiated community. Differentiated communities emerge as these various societal structures, that are already present merged in the complexity of the undifferentiated community, are disentangled from each other in order to be given a distinct positive form of their own.

State, church, trade union, social club, are examples of differentiated organised communities. It is characteristic of creation that man's formative activity in cultivating the creation leads to a greater differentiation of societal communities. Any movements toward a less differentiated condition must therefore be a retrograde movement. We can see such retrograde movements in some attempt to recapture a primitive communal life style in communes, and also in certain North American sects of Anabaptist descent where the attempt is made to restrain all of life within a single undifferentiated faith community.

The final distinction we need to notice for the present is that between institutional communities and voluntary associations. This distinction cuts across any natural and organised community distinction.

An institutional community is one in which the communal bond is independent of the will of the members, while a voluntary association is one in which the communal bond depends on the voluntary association of the members. In the institutional community, the communal bond exists regardless of the will of the members to associate or disassociate, whereas in the voluntary association it is the will of the members to associate that creates the communal bond between them.

The treatment of this particular distinction by Herman Dooyeweerd is marked by an unsatisfactory ambiguity - see his "New Critique of Theoretical Thought", Vol. 3, p. 187ff. At times he speaks as though the criterion for distinguishing the institutional community from the voluntary association centres around the question of the freedom of the individual member to join or leave.

This can have some appearance of validity if we consider the family and the state in both of which it is true that people become members, ordinarily at least, by birth - and it can also acquire some appearance of validity for the church, if we make infant baptism an essential mark of the church institution and if we take no account of the question of adult converts. It can hardly be applied to marriage, however, since surely here a person has the freedom to join or not to join at will. And, in the case of the church, even those who are prepared to accept that there can be no true church institution where infant baptism is rejected must still face the problem of the adult convert. Does not the adult convert have the freedom to join or not to join the church at will? What is there to compel him to join?

If we turn to the other half of the freedom to join or leave criterion, the difficulties multiply. We may say that an adult person ought not to leave the church, or ought not to forsake marriage, or ought not to desert the state of which he is a citizen, but can we say that he cannot do so? And while he can leave, can we speak of his not having freedom to do so? It appears evident that we can speak of this lack of freedom to leave in the case of the institutional communities only if we take this to mean that such an action is anti-normative. This would be giving the words "lack of freedom to leave" a most unusual sense and one that it seems clear Dooyeweerd does not intend.

When Dooyeweerd speaks of the institutional community as distinguished by the uniting of its members in a bond independent of their will, he is doubtless on the right track. He introduces confusion, however, when he {20} attempts to identify this principle with a lack of freedom to join or leave. It appears that this confusion arises because he has not distinguished sufficiently clearly between the underlying structural principles for the institutional communities of society and the positive forms given to those institutions through man's formative activity.

The true situation will be seen if we compare, for example, a cricket club, as an example of a voluntary association, and the church institution, as an example of an institutional community. No cricketer is bound in any way to the members of a cricket club until and unless he decides to associate himself with the cricket club by his own free choice. It is only when he chooses to join the club that he enters into the communal bond with the members of that club, and that communal bond remains only for so long as he remains a member of the club. If the whole club were to dissolve then the communal cricket club

bond between the members would be dissolved.

On the other hand, a Christian believer, by reason of the fact that he is a Christian believer, is bound to the members of the church institution even though he sinfully refuses to associate or sinfully disassociates himself from that institution. The communal bond is not created by his action in joining, or broken by his action in leaving. Because of the existing communal bond every believer ought to join, and ought not to leave the church institution, even though he does have the freedom that he can choose not to join, or, having joined, to leave, if he wishes. Even a decision by all the members unanimously of a particular church organisation to disband that organisation does not dissolve the communal church bond between them.

The same will be found to be true of the other institutional communities marriage, family, state - on the one hand, and of every other voluntary association on the other. It is not the freedom or the lack of freedom to join or leave that distinguishes the institutional community and the voluntary association, but the existence in the case of the institutional community of a communal bond that is independent of the will of the members.

Because the case of the Christian believer has been used to illustrate this situation should not be taken as implying a view of the church institution as being composed of believers only. That is a separate question outside the scope of this paper, but, for the record, I may say that it is emphatically not a view that I share.

In making these various distinctions among the individualities of society, we should take care not to make a distinction into a separation. The various societal communities are not to be envisaged as self sufficient units lying next to one another in society with nothing but accidental connections and contacts between them. The societal individualities, both personal and communal, are related together in a complex of structural inter-individuality relationships. Not only the internal structure of each individuality but also the relationships between the societal individualities is subject to the ordering Word of the Creator. Every individual human person, and every individual societal community, only functions within a complex of structural relationships with other societal individualities.

Some examples of such structural inter-individuality relationships can be seen in the relation of lawyer and client, between a commercial organisation and its customers, between the welfare organisation and the recipient of its welfare, between lessor and lessee, etc. {21}

The Structural Principles of the State

Previously, we discussed the relation of positive societal norms to the creational law by which the Creator orders the creation. We saw this as a response relationship in which the positive norms are not determined by the creational law and yet they are not autonomous but can be formed only in response to the creational law.

We saw also something of the importance of this for a consideration of the structures of various societal communities. We saw that the positive organisational norms that a societal community has at a given point in history are not to be identified with the

normative structural principles of the creational law, but that these norms are positivizations of the normative structural principle, more or less obedient. So, for example, the norm that a government should be elected by popular vote is a positive norm formulated by man in response to the divine law and is not an unalterable normative structural principle for the state. It is no doubt an evidence of apostasy in contemporary political thought when this positive norm is elevated to the status of an absolute principle, and when all states are evaluated by their adherence or non-adherence to it. The perennial difficulty that Christians have in dealing with the church/state issue is due in large measure to a failure to develop a clear understanding of the normative structure of these institutions, and much of the contemporary campaigning in the interests of moral purity is dissipated effort because of the same failure.

We will not be able here to engage in any extensive examination of the structural principles of the societal individualities in general. This is a very large field of study, and one that still awaits considerable further clarification. Though I acknowledge a great indebtedness to Herman Dooyeweerd for much insight into this issue as other matters, it seems to me that his analysis of the structural principles of societal structures remains unsatisfactory. I incline to agree with James Skillen, for example, when he speaks of “Dooyeweerd's limited and seemingly problematic discussion of the structure of the political party” as “not altogether conclusive or convincing” CALVINISTIC POLITICAL THEORY IN THE NETHERLANDS, unpublished doctoral thesis 1974, p.446. There are other areas also, for example, in discussing the trade union, where Dooyeweerd's analysis appears to me far from satisfying.

However, because of the largeness of the area, we must forego a discussion of these larger questions and confine ourselves, for the present, to an analysis of the structural principles of the state where we can hope, by such an analysis, to gain helpful clarity and fruitful insight. This is undoubtedly also an area of significant practical concern for many today. What we are really concerned with, in this analysis, is to isolate what it is that distinguishes the state from every other societal individuality. That it is a distinct individuality which can be distinguished from the other societal individualities is something that we know implicitly from our everyday experience. We are constantly engaged, without specifically thinking about it, in distinguishing the state from the church, from the family, from the business enterprise, from the trade union, etc. It is only on the basis of such an implicit distinction that we can protest when the affairs of, for example, trade union and state become confused with each other,

But, to ensure the Christian character of our activity in relation to the state, it is necessary that we not only make this implicit distinction, but that we articulate exactly what it is that makes the distinction possible. What is it exactly that distinguishes the state, enabling us to clearly distinguish it from other societal individualities? {22}

It will not be sufficient merely to describe the positive form of one state, nor to describe the various positive forms of a number of states. We are looking, rather, for what it is that all states underneath all their bewildering variety of positive forms, share in common. We are looking for the underlying normative structural principle of the creation law to which man responds in the various positive forms that he gives to the state.

Our Christian view of society that we have already developed forbids us, at the outset, from any view of the state that sees it as an all-encompassing structure embracing within it all the other structures of society. It can be no more than one of the many interlocking societal individualities directly subject to the rule of Christ in the kingdom of God.

A very common mistake is the identification of the state with the government. The government is not the state, it is only the government in the state. The state can be nothing else but the community of government and governed together. We will see this if we think of the very many times that a government has been overthrown even by a military coup, without destroying the state. Indeed, it is quite meaningless to speak of a government without governed. Government can only exist in relation to the governed.

Important as this is, it has not got us very far in our attempt to find the distinctive character of this community of government and governed that is the state. Other societal communities also have those who govern and those who are governed.

We have noticed earlier that the state is an organised institutional community. As an organised community it is founded in historical power formation. But so are all other organised communities, so that we must take our analysis still further if we are to find what it is that is distinctive to the state. In this connection we find that the state is distinguished from other organised communities in that it is founded in the monopolistic organisation of the power of the sword over a given territory. That is, the state wields effective coercive power over a given territory, a power that subordinates to itself all other coercive power within its territory. As Paul says; “It does not bear the sword for nothing” Romans 13:4.

Important as this is, it is still not sufficient to identify the state as a distinctive societal structure. A well organised band of brigands may wield effective coercive power over a given territory, subordinating to itself all other coercive power within that territory, but such a band does not constitute a state.

The state is distinguished from such a band of brigands, and from all other coercive power formations, by the fact that its coercive power is used for the specifically jural end of maintaining a public jural community of government and governed. Its distinctiveness comes from its being led in the exercise of its power by the end of public justice.

Neither the organisation of coercive power, nor the pursuit of the end of public justice, is sufficient to distinguish the state as a societal institution. A state is characterised by the inseparable coherence of these two as foundation and end of a public community of government and governed. There cannot be a state if this relationship is destroyed.

This should not be taken to mean that the state is confined to the jural function. It cannot be confined in this way any more than any other creature can be confined within one aspect of the creational functioning. As a creaturely community within God's creation, the state must function throughout the whole range of creational functions. It would be quite wrong, therefore, {23} to conclude from the distinctive character of the state, that the state

can have nothing to do with economic matters, or ethical matters, or aesthetic matters, or lingual matters. What distinguishes authentic state activity is not that it is confined to a particular jural modality, but that its functioning in all the modalities of the creation is always directed toward a jural end.

This distinguishing of the normative structural principles for the state provides the only effective basis for limiting the power of the state. Our earlier discussion of individualism will have alerted us for the idolatry involved when it is attempted to limit the power of the state by making the state the servant of the individual human person, so that its activities are limited by the interests of the individual person. Our discussion on universalism should have equally alerted us to the idolatry of all attempts to limit the power of the state by appeal to some communal “will of the people”. The true limitation of the power of the state can only be found within the creational law by which all creaturely law is limited and subordinated to the righteous will of the Creator.

Surrounding and interlocked with the state are various other societal communities, each of which also has its distinctive character arising from the normative structural principles of the creational law. The state will be guilty of transgressing that law if it abandons its own distinctive character at any point in order to attempt to take for itself the distinctive character of any one of these other societal communities. If, for example, it forsakes the leading of public justice in what it does and attempts to follow the lead of faith confession, its action will cease to have the character of a state action and illegitimately take on the character of a church action. In this case the state has illegitimately abandoned its role as state in an attempt to take over the role of church, which does not belong to it.

So, for example, it is proper for the state to act in economic matters while ever it is following the lead of public justice in such matters. If it for-sakes this leading of public justice in order to adopt the role of general societal economic manager, it has begun to act illegitimately contrary to its specific character as state. Similarly, it is proper for the state to act on moral issues while ever it is led, in such action, by public justice. Its actions become illegitimate actions, improper to the state, if it forsakes the leading of public justice in order to attempt to become a moral guardian of society. Again, it is quite proper for the state to concern itself with the arts while ever it is led in such concern by the interests of public justice. Its involvement in the arts will become improper for it, and, incidentally; ineffectual, if it forsakes this leading in order to assume the task of raising the cultural standards of society.

Only by a clear understanding of, and acting in accordance with, the normative structural principles will we achieve genuinely Christian political action. Such political action will, first and foremost, respect the structural principles for the state, and will have, as its first concern, the calling of all concerned with the state back to a path of faithfulness to these principles in the positive forming of the state. Authentically Christian political action will not want to transform the state into a church by making it a platform for preaching, nor will it want to pervert the power of the state by lending its support to the church to further the particular ends of the church. Neither will truly Christian political action expect to use the state as a bulwark against moral corruption.

Genuinely Christian political action will aim for the manifestation of the kingdom of God in the state in accordance with the distinctive unique character that the state has by the creation-ordering Word of God. In view of our {24} understanding of the relation of the structures of human society to the kingdom of God, discussed earlier, we can only conclude that such Christian political action is an imperative.

A truly Christian view of the state will also lead us to reject the dangerous absolutism implicit in the widespread conviction among Christians that all resistance to the state is evil. Since the state is not autonomous, but subject to the law of the Creator, the mere passing of a law by a state legislature does not legitimate it. Whenever the state forsakes its specific character as state, ceasing to be led by the interest of public justice, or forsaking the coercive power in which it is founded, it acts illegitimately.

This does not mean that we must rush in to organise resistance every time we believe we see the state departing from its specific character of state. We need to remember the sinfulness of all human life, which will reveal itself both in the activity of the state and in our own judgment concerning that activity. We will also need to remember that resistance can take different forms, and not assume that the organisation of force and protest is the only way to resist anti-normative activity. Nevertheless, with all these qualifications it remains our responsibility, not to simply accept blindly every action of the state as valid, but to continually keep under critical review such actions in the light of the Word of God. Again, authentic Christian political action, aimed at the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God in the life of the state, in accordance with the unique God-given character of the state, is an indispensable part of our calling and mission as Christians in the world. {25}