

The position of the church institute in society. A comparison between Bonhoeffer and Kuyper.

Gerard Dekker & George Harinck

In this paper we will compare the views on the church institute of the Dutch reformed theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) with those of the German Lutheran theologian and resistance fighter Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Their vision on the church and on the position of the church in society can only be properly understood against the background of their vision of the world. That is why we will devote some attention to that first. But before doing so, first a short description of these two people.

Bonhoeffer and Kuyper

The lives of Bonhoeffer and Kuyper show some remarkable parallels. And that is of importance because someone's view of life and the world is closely connected to what someone experiences in life.

Both could be described as brilliant theologians early in life. Both took their doctoral degree at a very early age and both dissertations discussed the church. After receiving their doctorates, both men became clergymen and worked at a university. Both played a leading role in the church struggle that flared up in their time and both men did not hesitate to break away from the church in which they initially worked to become 'leaders' of a secessionist or alternative church organisation. And in the end, both shifted their attention and activities away from the church and towards society in the broader sense. Moreover, both men went through a religious conversion in their lives. The subtitle with which Bethge furnished his biography of Bonhoeffer is therefore also applicable to Kuyper: 'Theologian - Christian - Contemporary'. Exactly the fact that they both played an important role outside the reality of the church is meaningful. After all, of Bonhoeffer one could say the same as what Vree wrote about Kuyper, namely that he 'continually adapted his ideal of being church according to (changes in) reality'.¹

¹ J. Vree, 'Organisme en instituut. De ontwikkeling van Kuypers spreken over kerk-zijn (1867-1901)', in: C. Augustijn and J. Vree, *Abraham Kuyper. Vast en veranderlijk*, Zoetermeer 1998, p. 86.

The vision of the world

Bonhoeffer and Kuyper both emphasized the meaning of the church for the world. Bonhoeffer was forced to do so by his own time, and this also happened to Kuyper: 'There was no connection between the church and our century, and Modernism has impelled us to search for it.'²

However, given the terminology that Kuyper and Bonhoeffer used, substantial differences seem to exist with regard to their world vision. In the church and in society Kuyper is confronted with an anti-Christian philosophy of life and uses the term 'antithesis' to denote the relationship between that philosophy of life and Christianity. In the church and also throughout society he wants to fight the secular philosophy of life and at least set the Christian philosophy of life against it. Bonhoeffer on the other hand speaks of an emancipated world, and does not want to contest it, but has a positive attitude towards it. As a result, their attitude towards the world seems to differ principally: Kuyper's ideal is to Christianize the world, while Bonhoeffer's attitude is one of acceptance.

However, the concept of antithesis has played a much more important role in the (in particular popular) reception of Kuyper than his publications warrant.³ Moreover, on this point he warned to proceed cautiously: 'There is a dividing line between the children of God and the children of the world (...) but if our spirit could discover even only a vague contour of that line, then our nature must already be most ennobled and by the Holy Ghost refined'.⁴

In addition, Kuyper clearly emphasizes a common grace: God not only bestows (personal) grace on people, but also a (common) grace on the whole world; a saving grace through which creation is maintained and throughout history God works to conserve, to curb evil and to 'still express, and still persevere in'⁵ the intention of creation. A similar notion can also be found in Bonhoeffer's work when he speaks of *das Aufhaltende*, the power that through God's sovereignty is active in history and which sets boundaries against evil.⁶

² A. Kuyper, *Het modernisme een fata morgana op christelijk gebied*, Amsterdam 1871, p. 49.

³ See: A. Kuyper, *De verflauwing der grenzen. Rede bij de overdracht van het rectoraat aan de Vrije Universiteit op 20 oktober 1892 gehouden* and A. Kuyper, *The Antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation*, Amsterdam/Edinburgh [1899]. Except in politics during the parliamentary elections of 1905 and 1909, he seldom used the word antithesis, and when he did, often in the non-principle sense of 'opposition' between two positions in a debate.

⁴ A. Kuyper, *De menswording Gods het levensbeginsel der kerk. Intreerede uitgesproken in de Domkerk te Utrecht den 10en november 1867*, Utrecht 1867, p. 22-23.

⁵ A. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part II, Kampen 1931³, p. 623.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, Volume 6 of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke, Gütersloh 1998², p. 122 ff.

On the other hand, Bonhoeffer most certainly knows of a world hostile to Christ:

‘The world “as such”, therefore as it understands itself and as it resists the reality of God’s love in Jesus Christ that was meant for it, even rejects it, has fallen to God’s judgment over all the hostility against Christ. With the religious community it now finds itself in a struggle between life and death.’⁷

That is why they have much more in common than would seem at first sight. The German theologian Georg Huntemann came to the same conclusion in his book *Der andere Bonhoeffer*:

‘Bonhoeffers und Kuypers Glaube bekennt, dass alles Christus unterworfen ist. Nach Abraham Kuypers wirkte auch im Kampf gegen die “Fata Morgana des Modernismus” die erhaltende und bewahrende Kraft Christi, die in der modernen Welt natürlich nicht bewusst wahrgenommen wird. Die erhaltende Gnade wirkt auch in der säkularisierten Welt des mündigen Menschen. – genauso sieht es Bonhoeffer. So kann man von Verständnis der allgemeinen Gnade Abraham Kuypers ausgehend Bonhoeffers Mündigkeit als eine solche Mündigkeit verstehen, die von der allgemeinen Gnade getragen ist und gleichzeitig im Blick auf abendländische Geschichtlichkeit im Lichte der besonderen Gnade steht.’⁸

Both are concerned with the confirmation of God’s sovereignty over this world, based on the acknowledgment that it is God’s world and that the world is God’s primary concern.

Perhaps Kuypers expressed this most forcefully in the speech he delivered on the occasion of the opening of the Vrije Universiteit: ‘there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry out: “Mine!”.’⁹ And in his *Pro rege of het koningschap van Christus* he discusses ‘the realization that Christ also

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 52. Further on in his *Ethik* Bonhoeffer states: ‘The body of Christ faces a hostile world.’ (p.123).

⁸ Georg Huntemann, *Der andere Bonhoeffer. Die Herausforderung des Modernismus*, Wuppertal/Zürich 1989, p. 88.

⁹ A. Kuypers, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring. Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten october 1880 gehouden, in het koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1880, p. 35.

takes possession of the world outside the church'¹⁰; a formulation that we also see in Bonhoeffer when he writes: 'Jesus takes possession of a world that has been emancipated'¹¹

In a study on Bonhoeffer, the Dutch theologian Gerard Rothuizen also pointed out the great similarity between Kuyper and Bonhoeffer on this point. 'Certainly, Bonhoeffer has stated that nothing, absolutely nothing, falls outside the scope of Christ's sovereignty. In this regard this German is similar to a certain Dutchman, who decades before had said the same thing. However, this did not prevent him (Kuyper) from simultaneously becoming an unprecedented advocate of what has become known among us as the "doctrine of common grace" - just as it did not prevent Bonhoeffer, up to and including his doctrine of divine mandates, from 'resembling his "predecessor" (in this)'¹²

That is the principal similarity. Thus, Kuyper's aim is that the world be christianised, and Bonhoeffer's is that Christ take shape in this world. Because God is concerned with this world. Naturally, in Kuyper's case this arose from his Calvinism:

'That is however exactly why the Calvinist *cannot* lock himself away in his church, to give up on the world, but rather, it is his exalted calling to develop the world to the very highest degree in accordance with God's ordaining, and in the midst of that world, all that is humanly honourable, sweet and harmonious, in order to uphold God's will.'¹³

But also Bonhoeffer, who was a Lutheran, believed that God was concerned with this world:

'It is not about the afterlife but about this world: how was this world created, maintained, bound to laws, become reconciled and renewed. In the gospel, what surpasses this world is meant *for* the world.'¹⁴

¹⁰ From the preface to A. Kuyper, *Pro rege*, quoted by J.C. Rullmann, *Kuyper- bibliografie*, part III, Kampen 1940, p. 379.

¹¹ A translation of 'die Inanspruchnahme der mündig gewordenen Welt durch Jesus Christus' in Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Theoloog – christen – tijdgenoot*, Baarn 2002, p. 888/9.

¹² G. Th. Rothuizen, *Aristocratisch christendom. Over Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Kampen 1969, p. 351.

¹³ A. Kuyper, *Het calvinisme. Zes Stone-lezingen*, Kampen 1959³, p. 58.

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Verzet en overgave. Brieven en aantekeningen uit de gevangenis*, Kampen 2003, p. 281: 'Die Strukturverwandschaft Kuyperschen und Bonhoefferscher Theologie ist erstaunlich und lässt Bonhoeffer (der sich selbst immer als Lutheraner verstand, aber als Reformierter verdächtigt wurde) sehr in die Nähe reformierter Theologie rücken.'

When discussing such issues both men had an eye for a society that had changed, and realized that church and world no longer converge. But because Christ is not only lord of the church, but above all lord of the world, church and world - however great the distinction between them might be - they must not be separated from one another or put in opposite camps.

Kuyper: 'Every division must be opposed with every possible power. Temporal and eternal life, our life in the world and in the church, religious and civic life, Church and State and so much more, may not be *separated*.'¹⁵

Bonhoeffer: 'that Christ's being lord corresponded with worldliness, and discipleship with participation in the temporal; that what is natural, profane, rational, humane did not get a place in opposition to, but with this Christ.'¹⁶

That is why both emphasize the connection between special grace and common grace. Huntemann describes the agreement between Bonhoeffer and Kuyper on this point as follows:

'Für Abraham Kuyper ist Christus gleichzeitig die Wurzel der allgemeinen, erhaltenden und bewahrenden Gnade und der besonderen, rettenden Heilsgnade. Für Bonhoeffer ist Christus die eine gleichzeitig bewahrende, erhaltende und erlösende Macht, die den ganzen Kosmos durchwirkt und auch solche Menschen ergreift, der ausserhalb dessen stehen, was wir heute christlich nennen möchten.'¹⁷

Church concept

Both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer were aware of the fact that society constantly changes and that those changes have an effect on the position of the church in society and on how church life is organized. As a result, their opinions about the church changed over time, which undoubtedly had to do with the experiences they gained in the course of their lives with the world and with the church. This meant however - and this was new in the theological world - that according to them the church was allowed to change the way it acted if this was

¹⁵ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part II, p. 638.

¹⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 894/the fifties.

¹⁷ Huntemann, *Der andere Bonhoeffer*, p. 62

what another time asked for. The time that the church embodied the public order had come to an end - in the Netherlands after 1848, in Germany after 1918. Christianity as the public sphere made way for a public of Christians.¹⁸ This break can be seen in Kuyper's description of the church as

‘an “assembly of believers”, a host of *adherents* acting together, who share their religious life in obedience to the ordinances that Christ gave them for this purpose. There is no ‘Heilsanstalt’ that hands out grace like medicine, there is no mystical religious order that magically works the layman. There are only faithful, confessing people, who, owing to the sociological urge of all religion, congregate, and, in submission to Christ as their King on high, try to live together.’¹⁹

According to Kuyper a church may never claim ‘that salvation is bound to the form of church’ and believed that it should wait ‘for the mortal flaw, to regard *firmness* and *immutability* of form as words of a similar sound’.²⁰

Half a century later Bonhoeffer even applied changeability to preaching: ‘Therefore the church may not proclaim principles that are “always” true, but only commandments that are true now. Because precisely what is always “true”, is not true “now”.’²¹

From what Kuyper and Bonhoeffer said about the church, we cannot automatically conclude how churches in this day and age, in a different situation and in another time should organize themselves or how they should act. However, the main features of their church concept could still be useful in the present situation, despite, or perhaps precisely because, that vision was developed in a different age and with an eye to a different situation.

A fundamental fact is that both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer use a double or dual church concept. Kuyper consciously and systematically speaks of church as institute and church as organism:

‘that the *Ecclesia visibilis* has a *twofold* form of existence, firstly as *organism* and secondly as *institute*. As organism, where you can observe its organic workings in the people and in the relationships among

¹⁸ Cf. the concise characterization of this break by Peter van Rooden, ‘Bilderdijk en het moderne onderzoek naar godsdienst’, *Het Bilderdijk-museum* 18 (2001), p. 7-11.

¹⁹ Kuyper, *Het calvinisme*, p. 50.

²⁰ Vree, ‘Organisme en instituut’, p. 89/90, quoted from Kuyper, *De menschwording Gods*, p. 14.

²¹ Quoted by Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 266.

them, and as institute, in as far as it has, through independent organisation, developed into a specific form.’²²

The institute is the form and is temporal, the organism is the essence and is eternal: ‘The institute serves the organism, and as such is only instrumental’.²³

In Bonhoeffer’s case we find a similar dichotomy, but this duality can only be described after an exact analysis of what he wrote about the church. After all, Bonhoeffer left us with nothing more than an ‘incomplete ecclesiology’²⁴. In his *Ethik*, he himself speaks of ‘the dangerous but inevitable ambiguity’ of the church concept he uses.²⁵ At least in his work one can distinguish between the religious community on the one hand and on the other hand the church as the manifestation of Christ.²⁶

Bonhoeffer states that under the proclamation of God’s word, a *community* originates: ‘That is the grouping of people “who accept Christ’s word”, who “congregate for the word of God” and who form a community that distinguishes itself from worldly ordinances’²⁷ But he also states that: the church is nothing other than that part of humanity in which Christ has truly taken form’²⁸

We could speak of a narrow and a broad church concept. The first is an institute that is organizationally distinguished in society; the second is a quantity in this world that is difficult to demarcate. The former is an institute, the latter primarily something that happens between people. The first is limited in its range, the second has a bearing on all aspects of life.

Because God is concerned with the world, for both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer the broad church concept - or rather: the broad manifestation of the church in the world - is the most important. However, both of them do recognise the necessity of a church institute (it even has a place in a God-given order), but that institute is only one of the forms of existence of what they see as church in this world. Given the nature of the case, both of these manifestations of the church are closely connected.

The ecclesiastical institute

²² A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, part III, Kampen 1908/1909², p. 204.

²³ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, part III, p. 215.

²⁴ Compare Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 913.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 410.

²⁶ For an analysis of Bonhoeffer’s church concept compare with: Gerard Dekker, *De kerk lost niets op. Bonhoeffer over de relatie tussen kerk en wereld*, Kampen 2006, p. 49-85.

²⁷ Compare Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 398 ff.

²⁸ *Idem*, p. 84.

From the very outset Kuyper attributed to the church a two-fold character: it is 'neither exclusively an *institute*, nor only an *organism*, but both', as the most well-known pair of words read with which he described this dichotomy.²⁹ The form of the institute was the vehicle of the spirit. He was concerned with the spiritual community, but after an initial depreciation of the form, after his period in Utrecht, he emphasized its importance. 'The church is one, and by virtue of its essence it is an organism', states Kuyper, but it must 'also have its own organisation'.³⁰ The ecclesiastical institute exists for and limits itself to the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments. While church discipline is also an essential part of the institute.

Kuyper: 'The church as institute exists through its offices, which Christ established, and hence exclusively serves the preaching of the word, the administration of the Sacraments, the collection, and furthermore church discipline, which arises from the Sacrament as a matter of course.'³¹

Bonhoeffer: 'It has become clear that the community of Jesus Christ in the world needs *space for proclamation*. The body of Christ is visible in the community that surrounds Word and Sacrament'³² And: 'To a community living the gospel worthily, belongs the exercise of *community discipline*.'³³

Moreover, in Kuyper's opinion there are several institutes, which indicates the subordinate importance of institutes in comparison to the spiritual community: 'As far as the church as *institute* is concerned, the followers are divided up among several institutes, and each person joins the institute which in his opin-

²⁹ According to Kuyper in 1870, quoted in J. Vree, *Kuyper in de kiem. De precalvinistische periode van Abraham Kuyper 1848-1874*, Hilversum 2006, p. 314. Before this date the wording varies - and with it the meaning. In 1867 he wrote *De menschwording Gods*, p. 13: 'On the one hand, the form of Jesus' church should therefore be *fixed*, because the eternal character of divine life is only reflected in what is stable and permanent, but likewise, that fixed form must be destroyed and broken up by the movements of the spirit and external influences as soon as the spirit no longer serves as a vehicle, but acts as a constraint.' Here form and spirit are opposites.

³⁰ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, part III, p. 306.

³¹ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part III, p. 424.

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Navolging*, Baarn 1964/2001, p. 184.

³³ Bonhoeffer, *Navolging*, p. 216/7.

ion is the purest³⁴ Moreover, the ecclesiastical institute is a temporary phenomenon, which will disappear after the Last Day.

In Kuyper and Bonhoeffer the ecclesiastical institute is also about a 'pure' church, a church that is made up of the true believers. According to Kuyper, the faithful convene as a community for a meeting *among themselves*, 'where God himself appears'.³⁵ 'This all takes place invisible to the seeing eye, but as in a mystery, for the eye of faith'³⁶ According to Kuyper, a requirement at that point is 'that this community in meeting undoes the bonds with the world and works and pulls at the bond with its God'.³⁷ In other words, a church that is clearly distinguished from the world. In Kuyper the sacredness of the church was central,³⁸ while Bonhoeffer emphasizes the necessity of *Arkan-disziplin*, on the necessity to keep the secret. As a result, both make a clear distinction and set a clear boundary between the ecclesiastical institute and the world.

Despite this clear distinction, the ecclesiastical institute is still of essential importance to the world. 'Not only did God create all, and is he everything to all, but his grace not only extends to the chosen in a partial way, but also to all people in the "common grace". Certainly, there is concentration in the church, but that church has windows in its walls, and through those windows the light of the Everlasting shines out throughout the entire world.'³⁹

If things are as they ought to be, this has a strong influence not only on the religious life of people, but also on (the preservation of) the world. And more strongly so if the church maintains its ecclesiastical character.

³⁴ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part III, p. 425. Cf. A. Kuyper, *Eenvormigheid, de vloek van het moderne leven. Lezing, gehouden in het Odéon te Amsterdam, 22 april 1869*, Amsterdam 1870², p. 30: 'A church that is the same as ours now is, falls away, and is in a worse state of decay; it rots away while still alive. Well then, whoever wants church restoration, do not seek to restore a form of church that has passed judgement on itself. All new formations of church completely purify, before all else, the curse of uniformity, which is the mother of the lie. One forces nothing, and does not aim to unify what is not one in life. If there are those of good intention who are of one mind and spirit, let them unite, and encourage them to confess the faith in their hearts, but also not to express a stronger unity than is truly shared. In this way, in complete autonomy, let groups and circles unite, they who know what they want know what they confess, and for whom there is a unity in life, and not unity in name.'

³⁵ A. Kuyper, *Onze eeredienst*, Kampen 1911, p. 17-20, 205.

³⁶ Kuyper, *Eeredienst*, p. 25.

³⁷ *Idem*, p. 22. Cf. p. 324: The clergyman in the church service 'speaks not to the world, but to those who are cut off from the world and included in the covenant.'

³⁸ Kuyper, *Het calvinisme*, p. 59: Church discipline has been established 'not only to cut off scandals, nor only, and not even primarily, to prune vines that grow too abundantly, but in order that *God's Covenant be kept sacred*, and that the impression be firmly established in the world beyond the church that God is of purer eyes than to behold evil.'

³⁹ Kuyper, *Het calvinisme*, p. 43.

Kuyper: 'And it is through indirect influence that the church as institute blesses the whole nation and the entire life of a nation. (...), that that blessing will be all the greater and all the more delightful the clearer the light of the Gospel shines in God's churches, and in those churches it will burn all the stronger the purer the flame and the purer the atmosphere is in which that flame flares up'⁴⁰

Bonhoeffer: 'Only if the salt remains salt and keeps its purifying, spicy power, can the earth be preserved by the salt. For its own sake as well as for the earth's sake, salt must remain salt and the community must continue to belong to the disciples, which it is through Christ's call. Therein will lie both its true influence on this earth and its power to preserve.'⁴¹

Kuyper also uses the salt imagery: 'Thus it remains according to the rule as Christ himself put it: His church a city on the mountain, which catches everyone's eye from afar. His church a salt in the midst of this worldly life to stem the tide of the decay in that world.'⁴²

An important fact regarding both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer is that the ecclesiastical institute and Christian religious life do not converge: 'the personal life of the believer essentially lies outside its organisation'.⁴³ The ecclesiastical institute only has a bearing on part of people's religious life. To put it another way: religious life is not absorbed into the ecclesiastical institute; religion is experienced in the world in particular, and within the world there is no isolated sacred terrain; all of life is religion. That is why for both men a clericalization of life was taboo. In Kuyper's case this is based on the concept of sphere sovereignty, in the case of Bonhoeffer is it a result of his opinion about the divine mandates, according to which the ecclesiastical community is not allowed to be dominant in other terrains. This directly touches on the position of the ecclesiastical institute in society.

Ecclesiastical institute and society

There is no doubt that both Bonhoeffer and Kuyper's arguments are aimed at society. After all, God is involved with the world and that is why the same ap-

⁴⁰ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part II, p. 273.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Navolging*, p. 75/6.

⁴² Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part II, p. 273.

⁴³ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, part III, p. 194.

plies for the Christian religion; and that is why the church is oriented towards the world, whereby the intention is that the church influences the world.

But what is the role of the ecclesiastical institute in this? That is an indirect one; because both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer opposed a clericalisation of life. For that reason, a clear distinction must be made between the Christian community on the one hand and secular society on the other.

Kuyper: ‘That is why power for the greater good can only be exerted if one firmly keeps in mind that the community of Christ can never directly, but only indirectly through its influence on civilian society, have an effect (...) In short: A strict confessional church, but *no* confessional civilian society, *no* confessional state. This secularisation of state and society is one of the most profound basic principles of Calvinism.’⁴⁴

Bonhoeffer: ‘... that world is world and community is community, and that still God’s word must come from within the community to be sent throughout the world as the message that the earth and all that exists on it, is of the Lord; that is the “political” character of the religious community.’⁴⁵

Therefore, in both Kuyper and Bonhoeffer’s thinking there is only room for a more limited role of the ecclesiastical institute within society; ‘here there is not the potestas architectonica in it’.⁴⁶ Both are of the opinion that ‘the church’ should be oriented towards society, but not as an institute, but through the people. Here also the use of a dual ecclesiology is important: the ‘narrow’ church concept concerns a church that is clearly distinct, yes, even in its organisation, removed from it. The ‘broad’ church concept on the other hand concerns the church as it stands in the world, yes, that takes place in the world; to Kuyper’s mind this was the ‘true church’: ‘the continued effect of the powers of the Kingdom of God in the world’.⁴⁷ The attitude therefore of both these church forms in relation to society are different.

Kuyper indicates this explicitly in one of his descriptions of the various forms of church:

⁴⁴ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part II, p. 278 and 279

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Navolging*, p. 210.

⁴⁶ Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, part III, p.194.

⁴⁷ H.J. Langman, *Kuyper en de volkskerk. Een dogmatisch-ecclesiologische studie*, Kampen 1950, p. 117. Langman takes this emphasis from A. Kuyper, *E voto Dordraceno. Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen catechismus*, part II, Amsterdam 1893.

‘The church as institute exists through the offices, which Christ established, and hence exclusively serves the preaching of the word, the administration of the Sacraments, the collection, and furthermore church discipline, which arises from the Sacrament as a matter of course. As things stand now, of course the Church does not come into contact with public life, is completely separated from it and stands opposite from it. However, if one realizes that the Church is not merely institute, but is also an *organism*, and as such consists of believers, with the many powers of grace living amongst them and working in them, then of course it’s an entirely different matter. Then those believers are the same people who in their families act as parents and children, in their businesses as patrons and workers, in society as citizens and who, as such, make the powers of the kingdom felt in their domestic lives, in their education, in their businesses and in all contacts with people and also as citizens in society. Whereas the Church as institute is removed from the world and therefore stands opposite to it, the Church as organism enters into the life of the world in exactly the opposite way, turns it around, gives it another form, raises it and sanctifies it’⁴⁸

And Bonhoeffer also clearly expressed his view about it in his *Ethik*:⁴⁹

‘It is for example the question, whether capitalism or socialism or collectivism are economic systems that obstruct religion to such an extent. For the church there is a *twofold course of action*: *on the one hand*, in a delimiting and negative way, but with God’s authority, it will have to declare objectionable such economic convictions that clearly keep people from believing in Jesus Christ. *On the other hand*, it will positively without God’s authority, but only on the authority of the advice given with a sense of responsibility by Christian experts, be able to offer its contributions to a new order. Both courses can be clearly distinguished. The first course is that of the office, the second that of the diaconate [originally Bonhoeffer wrote ‘laymen’ here], the former divine, the latter worldly the former that of the divine word, the latter that of Christian life.’⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, part III, p. 424/5.

⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, in particular in the chapter ‘Over de mogelijkheid van het woord van de kerk aan de wereld’ (p. 354-364). For a comparison see Dekker, *De kerk lost niets op*, p. 104-112.

⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, p. 363/4.

Conclusion

When we review the foregoing it is difficult to deny that one can point out many similarities between Kuyper and Bonhoeffer's views on the church. Which does not mean to say that their ideas were exactly the same. For our purposes we looked for those points on which they agreed of course, and did not pay attention to the differences and nuances that we could also have found. Differences and nuances that are obviously connected with the time and the situation in which they lived, as well as their different confessional backgrounds, but which also result from the fact that they undoubtedly thought differently about a number of issues. We believe however that they do not differ to such an extent that the picture of their church concepts that we have outlined here is not well-founded. We have tried to describe the main features of their way of thinking and believe that there is much agreement between the two on that point.

Particularly where it concerns the place and the function of the church institute within and in relation to society, do Kuyper and Bonhoeffer's views show great similarities:

- The church institute is of relative importance because the primary concern is the Kingdom of God (Kuyper) or the manifestation of Christ in this world (Bonhoeffer).
- The church institute is characterized by and is in principle limited to preaching God's Word and administering the Sacraments and should be as pure a religious community as it can be.
- As such, the institute is certainly of essential importance to the world, because it - like the salt of the earth - offers an impulse towards Christian life and aims for the preservation of this world and humanity.
- In influencing the world the institute should refrain from exercising its power in whatever form and should watch out for the danger that lies in the clericalisation of life.