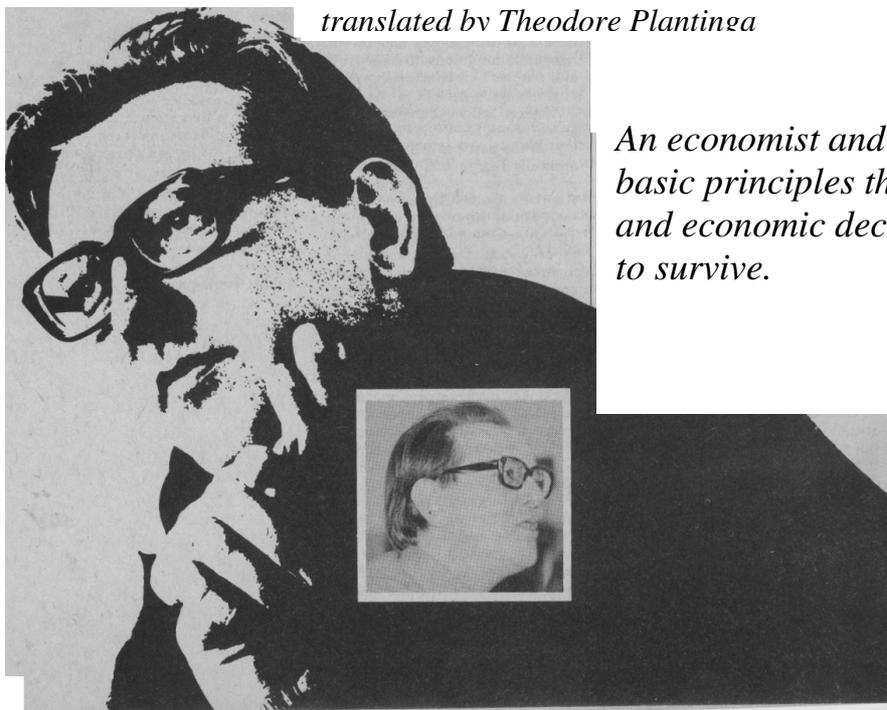


Economics and Christian faith:

an interview with Bob Goudzwaard

translated by Theodore Plantinga



An economist and politician talks about the basic principles that must guide our political and economic decisions if western nations are to survive.

You experience Christ in your life and in your scientific thinking as a great liberation from self-centredness and spasmodic existence. How is this life in Christ realized in you?

For me this life is a foundation and at the same time an opening up. By a foundation I mean that it gives me a certainty that protects me from spasmodic behaviour, e.g. clinging to my job because I feel the necessity of showing through it that I'm a somebody. Christ has made me a somebody, and I don't need to do it myself.

The other element closely bound up with it is the opening up ... [which] says something about the deepest direction of our life in God's Kingdom. Perhaps I can make myself clear by quoting something a minister said at the funeral of Queen Wilhelmina: "Christ is at the horizon of all our paths." I believe what he meant was this: Christ's return will become a reality at a given moment. His feet will walk the earth. But the Bible announces this in very dynamic terms, for it tells us that Christ *is* coming. He's already busy with his coming now, and therefore we can go to meet him. This gets us moving. The apostles tell us to hasten the day of Christ's return. Thus it's an activity. What this means especially - and that's what I find exciting - is that his coming is at the end of all our ways. Everything in life, including scientific activity, politics, the path which a society follows, and so forth, leads finally to him as the fulfillment of everything. Thus Christ is not only the foundation of life but also the one who opens it up. Therefore it is not necessary for a scientist to take on artificial airs of piety to wind up ultimately where he should be at the horizon. Christ is also the fulfillment of the path which science follows and the course of political action which we are taking and have taken.

Why did you, as a Christian, go into economics, of all fields? Isn't the christian faith, by its very nature, in disharmony or conflict with the rationalistic thinking of today's economic science?

After my secondary education I took up economics at the university. In a positive sense I have always looked upon politics and economics as the areas in which to fulfill myself personally. I spent some years as a member of the Second Chamber of our Dutch parliament, and there I repeatedly felt the need of deepening my work in a scientific direction. Now that I'm actually busy with scientific analyses, it's no accident that the university position I've found is in a social-political faculty. In any event, the areas of politics and economics are very closely connected in my life.

As far as rationalistic thinking is concerned, it's a presupposition of my doctoral dissertation *Unpriced Scarcity* that the unique field of investigation of economics is not determined by reason, which in a sovereign way brings forth its cognitive object through a creative thought process, as I was told when I was a first year student of economics. I believe that this view is in conflict with what the Bible teaches us about the creation, namely, that it was made by God and that he himself established an order in it. It is not true that the human mind creates order in the world as it receives a chaos of sensory impressions.

I believe, on the contrary, that economic life, which unfolds in a certain manner, gets the meaning and form which it has from reacting, whether positively or negatively, to the mandate of stewardship that God has given man. You can act in an uneconomical manner and thereby disregard your neighbour and exploit nature, but you can also serve God and your neighbour in economic life. The mandate that imposes responsibility on man is also the starting-point of my scientific analysis.

This means that I must view what man does with the scarce goods of the creation not as an experiential chaos but as a reaction and answer to God's command that we be stewards. And stewardship is not limited to our care and disposition of the goods that command a price on the market. It also includes the careful preservation of nature around us. I believe that environmental economics should be regarded as part of economics from the very start and should be subordinated to the mandate of stewardship.

The word "mandate" calls to mind a number of colonialist practices. Do you use the word to indicate that we are called to be human beings in the full sense of the term, or do you mean by it a number of circumscribed tasks?

The word "mandate" is close to the word "calling." It means a "commission," but without the cold meaning that this word sometimes has for us, as when we think of a clearly defined task which you perform and then you're finished. A mandate means that you try to act in the spirit of the one who sent you. You use your own judgement, but act in his spirit. Thus it doesn't mean following a legalistic set of rules. It means being a representative of the living God, who will later ask you to give an account of what you have done. Naturally the mandate doesn't concern economic life alone but applies to all of life. I believe that everyone has received the mandate of stewardship in some sense. It's not just something for economists to worry about.

But doesn't the fact that your field is economics somehow determine the perspective from which you look at society?

Yes and no. If I'm asked to lecture on economics, then I do try to look at society from an economic perspective and investigate the consequences of the fulfillment or neglect of the mandate of stewardship that we were talking about. But because economics - especially in the sense of money as criterion in the market economy - has assumed far too much importance

and influence in our society, I also see it as my task to combat what we might call “economism.”

You see this economism, for example, when voters judge political parties exclusively by asking, “What has the party done for the financial interests of my group?” You also see it when workers and employers judge, their labour unions and associations by asking, “What’s in it for me? How much more money does this put in my pocket?” On that consideration alone they make up their minds about their organization!

You also see this economism when the government sets more and more economic goals for the nation, as though that’s the, only thing to be concerned about. Economism likewise plays a role in the contacts people have with each other, sometimes in the way they measure each other with economic yardsticks - although that’s not as widespread as it once was, fortunately. For example, sometimes you hear someone say, “I have to take my hat off to Smith,, for he’s making a lot more money than Jones.” Economism also figures in our evaluation of work.

From what you’ve said it’s apparent that you don’t regard science as value-free. But the other side of this question is that science can also be used to legitimate social relationships and social structures. Do you see this as a danger in your own work?

Any scientific activity, whether we are aware of it or not, has a certain influence on the society around it. In itself this is already a fundamental criticism of the supposed freedom from values assumed even in the social sciences. In my opinion the whole doctrine that science is value-free rests on an a priori prejudice to the effect that science should not depend on particular prejudices. But science is never without them. The choice of a field of research is not value-free, and the scientific method with which we go to work selectively and interpretively is not value-free either.

But you can also turn the doctrine of freedom from values into its opposite by arguing that science ought to have some sort of direction, that is to say, that it ought to lead to desired results that have been chosen on the basis of certain prejudices. The most important prejudices in society are political, and therefore in this view science ought to provide a confirmation of the rightness or wrongness of certain political standpoints. In that case the results of so-called scientific research are already determined in advance, i.e. a standpoint for or against certain political judgements.

I call this “the dictatorship of the *a posterioris*,” for what scientific research then becomes is an institution for the realization of one’s own practical political goals. With Abraham Kuyper I would respond to this line of thought by saying that it violates the “sphere-sovereignty” of science. I regard both the denial and the misuse of scientific prejudices as a great danger, and I must point out, unfortunately, that there is a growing inclination on both sides of the Iron Curtain to use science in such ways.

If economics itself cannot give us a normative principle for analyzing the relevant problematics in a scientific way, on what do you base the need for a normative principle? Do you base it in the results and givens of other sciences, or do you seek it more in a normative principle serving as a foundation for all scientific activity?

Naturally I do not seek salvation in a normative principle drawn from economics itself, for history has already shown what this leads to: Western society has organized itself around economic factors as a principle promising salvation. Thus, during the Industrial Revolution, the life of the family became an extension of the economic process of production,

and today the pollution of the environment continues because, from the standpoint of a market economy, it appears to be profitable.

In the first place I would like to proceed from a coherence and not from specific, isolated economic problems or sets of problems. My predecessor at the Free University of Amsterdam, Dr. T.P. van der Kooy, always spoke in this context of a simultaneous realization of all of God's norms. He meant by this that when we comply with the economic norm, we must at the same time take into account the promotion of justice and mercy in our contacts with others. In reality a number of norms requiring simultaneous realization have been given. If they are not realized together, we simply will not get to where we want to go in economic life.

As far as the question of normativity is concerned, we must remember in the first place that actual economic activity and practice live in the tension of whether or not we will use up what God has created. This has to do with an economic norm that is a priori not just to all scientific activity but to all of human life. Man's economic activity arises against the background of a calling from God to rule over the creation for him in a just manner. Against that background and with the potentials contained in the creation, an economic life subject to norms is born. The second normative factor is that human economic action always takes place within a particular social context. We act economically not as absolute individuals but as heads of families, as businessmen, as members of labour unions, and so forth. The striking thing, now, is that these encompassing social contexts cannot be understood on the basis of economic norms alone. A government, for example, will have to act in a just way and in the general interest. A family acts as a community of love and upbringing; with its ethically qualified forms of upbringing and day-to-day care, it is led by the norm of mutual affection. Now, if I disregard the ethical roots of the family, I cannot as economist explain its economic actions. In this way I run into problems with the normative element.

As far as economic activity itself is concerned, I believe - and this is the third way in which economic norms must be recognized - that the connections which the economist posits between cause and effect (i.e. causal relations) cannot be made too much in accordance with a deterministic pattern or a particular calculation of probability. We must always take into account a normative economic element, which must be seen in relation to the subject's own economic responsibility.

What I mean is this. When we ask who has brought about our inflation and what its causes are, we are asking economic questions, but they can only be answered against the background of the responsibility of our government, of the major banks, and of the American government. Thus we also get involved with the principle of normativity through human responsibility.

What are your expectations about the future of our society, which, as I see it, is becoming less and less of a constitutional state and more and more of a state oriented toward economic prosperity?

People tend to frown on the use of the word "judgement" in connection with our expectations about the future, but I would nevertheless attach a definite meaning to it with regard to the western world. Western society has in a certain sense gone through the christian faith. The christian church has proclaimed the gospel - sometimes by frightfully unchristian means. In any event, the gospel has been a factor of importance in the west, while I have the impression that a growing segment of the western world is turning away from it - and is sometimes led to

do so by how Christians act and live. As Christians we are involved in the “No” which western society is saying to the gospel.

Do you mean that the west must be converted?

I certainly do. I believe that without conversion, a better society will not be possible in the west. In the future the dilemma will focus more and more on the question of whether or not we should go ahead on the basis of a boundless faith in the forces of prosperity and a better technology or whether we should face the necessity of taking the responsibility away from these forces. And I don't see how we can ever accomplish the latter without a faith that does *not* deify economic and technical possibilities, a faith that knows that these forces are bound by God's appeal to us to be responsible for them.

I do not believe that within the context of human self-centredness, people in our society will feel the need to declare themselves bankrupt and begin anew. They have indeed said good-bye to the christian faith, and in my opinion, they're probably more willing to die a heroic death than to be converted.

That, of course, is possible. The Bible speaks in this context of people hardening their hearts. But if I may, I'd like to draw your attention to the moving book of Hosea, in which God compares his relationship to his own children to a man's relationship to a wife who is repeatedly unfaithful to him. This suggests to me that we should not worry in the first place about what people might be prepared to do under certain circumstances: we must pay attention to God. God says: “I will close off all your paths one by one so that you run stuck on every side and no longer have any hope of, escaping and will see the only way that remains open, the way that leads back to me.” The fact that western society is mired very deeply in essential problems may be an indication that God is addressing a final appeal to us, that he has led us into this crisis precisely because he wants to remind us where we have come from.

I'm more inclined to believe that we are now in “Egypt,” so to speak, and that God is testing us by means of the plagues that have come upon us.

But there is also a promise held out to the western world!

That promise, as I see it, is for the other believers who stand firm, of whom the Bible also speaks clearly.

But that contains too much the suggestion that the non-Christians in the western world have gotten themselves into a mess and will be judged, while we as Christians will somehow be rescued by God. When I hear talk of a division along these lines, I feel compelled to reply that there is a solidarity of guilt. Through our forefathers we Christians share in the choice which the west has made, and today - often despite ourselves - we still confirm that choice. Thus Christians must not try to separate themselves from the western world as though they had nothing whatsoever to do with the crisis. We are drawn into the present situation in part through our own guilt.

I believe not only that the idea of a “faithful remnant” is biblical but also that it is beginning to take on concrete form in our time. In some places Christians are being barred from public life and prevented from assuming influential positions. They are being pushed to the sidelines, and this is certainly not their own doing. I know better than to decide on my own who belongs to the company of the “faithful believers” and

who does not, yet I do believe that there are definite limits to the solidarity of which you speak.

When I talk about the solidarity of our guilt, I am addressing myself to other people in our western society in order to seek a new way *together* with them. I don't like to take refuge in the idea of a "faithful remnant" too quickly because it is often a disguised argument to the effect that we should not concern ourselves much with certain developments for which we share the responsibility. I'm not implying that you meant it that way, but a premature introduction of the thoroughly biblical motif of the remnant that is preserved can have the effect of undermining what we have to say to western culture.

Personally I understand this motif in the sense that the centre of the christian faith by which we are saved might be transplanted from the west to some other area, e.g. the Third World.

Yes, I'm sympathetic to that. But I must ask for caution here, for we're now talking in essence about whether a society is able to commit the sin against the Holy Spirit. We are asking whether a society may have tasted the power of a coming age and rejected it. That would be to commit a sin that will never be forgiven by God.

Jesus said: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." This applies to societies as well as to the lives of individuals. The more the west tries to maintain itself in its dialogue with the east by placing rapid economic growth in the foreground and emphasizing the redemptive power of technology, the more it undermines its own existence and loses itself.

In the west justice and freedom are still recognized to a certain extent as norms. W.A. Visser't Hooft once compared them rightly to flowers that have been cut. They will wither after they are cut off from their roots in the earth - which is when the gospel disappears from society. Inwardly they are already withering, although their outward appearance remains unchanged for some time.

I'm well aware that when the gospel disappears from society and a hardening takes place, we should expect things to go wrong in a radical way. But I also believe that we should not be too quick to assume the worst - especially if we have not clearly warned the people around us about the dangers. We must not be too quick to sketch the situation as completely hopeless and maintain that only judgement can follow.

Part II



In Part I, Dr. Goudzwaard talked about political and economic principles, for survival. Here he discusses how the gospel can save society, the solidarity of guilt, and what being a neighbour means today.

When you speak about the general Economics crisis of western culture, I'm more inclined to ask about the spiritual and substance of this crisis than about its outward signs. In the mood of our time I sense an undercurrent of Christian despair, which one finds even in protests from conservative circles.

I don't attach too much significance to a subjective feeling of despair or a mood of decline. But it can be important to the extent that it signifies an awareness that progress itself is threatening us. In a certain sense, the attack on progress is a new dimension which was not present when Oswald Spengler wrote his book *The Decline of the West*. Karl Lowith even speaks of the fate of progress. This can mean that people are indeed aware that they have run stuck and have been deceived by their own gods. It can also mean that a possibility has been created for making clear to people just what the gospel contains.

I sense in what you say - when you talk about conversion - that you don't put too much emphasis on personal conversion but think instead in global terms, as it were, as though a society or a nation could be converted.

That's the influence of the Rev. S.G. de Graaf of Amsterdam, who emphasized that both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament we read about nations appearing before the throne of God. The nations will be brought before his face, and he will judge them. Justification and the judgement of God are individual matters, but at the same time they involve nations, societies and civilizations.

I believe that Greek civilization will be judged, as well as the path which the Jewish people have followed in history. The Jewish nation has enjoyed a definite relationship to God, and this relationship is still alive. The same can be said of the civilization of our country and of Europe.

Therefore I avoid any heavy, one-sided emphasis on the individual's salvation through Christ, for my own guilt may be part of the reason for the condemnation of western civilization. I believe that this element has been somewhat forgotten among Christians.

What you appreciate about the protest of many young people against the consumer society is the quest for a new outlook on man and the world. Do you regard this quest in itself as something positive?

The quest is positive to the extent that it creates an opening, but it will remain fruitless if its final result is a new form of self-assertion. But today's general disorientation may give birth to a readiness to listen to the gospel as a saving power, as Paul calls it. The gospel is like a sword that penetrates to the depths of your heart and mind. It is also a power that can renew human society. Such a power was at work during the time of the Reformation.

On an individual level I have indeed experienced the gospel as a saving power, and I know that others have done so as well. Can you explain how the gospel can be a saving force for a society?

I'll try to make it clear by way of an example. Something we see more and more often is people gathering outside government buildings on a Monday to protest against the increasing pollution of the air and coming back the next day with signs demanding higher wages and lower prices, denying all the while that there is any relation between Monday's issues and Tuesday's issues. They are simply not aware that our belief that higher incomes will bring us happiness can also be the cause of the increasing destruction of nature. The question, of course, is how to resolve the conflict between economic growth and pollution.

There are some who explain pollution simply on the basis of economic growth and advocate a return to a natural state, in which man again has to learn to be subordinate to nature. Some communities put this into practice and withdraw completely from society on abandoned farms where they live on organic foods. As I see it, this approach rests on a divided morality, for what it comes down to is that other people must do the work to improve society.

On the other hand, there are organizations and interest groups that say that economic growth must be continued. Lacking an alternative, they cling fiercely to this position. Now, I see no other way to get out of this dilemma than to be liberated by a God who makes humankind responsible for what happens in the human economic system, also where nature is concerned.

The false dilemma arose because technology, science, and economic growth were either banished to the world of demons or promoted to the world of angels or bearers of salvation. Only the gospel makes it possible for us to regard economic growth and technology as creaturely forces. They do bear within themselves the possibility of bringing about some good, but they are subject to man's responsibility. Hendrik van Riessen, who teaches philosophy here at the Free University, maintains that these forces in our society have been made independent. I agree with him, and I believe that our trailing along behind them is really a form of religion. If we assume our responsibilities in the areas of economics, technology, and science, I see a possibility of gaining clarity with regard to such issues as environmental protection and air pollution. Because we speak of the gospel as a saving power for society too, there is something I would like to add, precisely because we are again dealing with faith.

In the first chapter of the gospel of John we read about the Word (Christ) that was spoken by God. Thus God directs himself toward us as Word, and this means that he expects a response from us. Our entire life is lived out under the great dome of this theme. God made the creation along these lines, for he put economic treasures into the earth, thereby creating possibilities for technology and culture and also for the propagation of humankind. This is God's voice calling; it is his Word. I mean by this that we cannot separate anything from the fact that we

are responsible for what we do with all these possibilities. But we have deified them and made them independent forces and have allowed them to function as our guide. Only when we view these possibilities within the context of a relationship of responsibility can we say today - without branding the economic as something demonic, as Jacques Ellul does - that we must make a choice that is responsible in political and social respects. The respect for living nature then forms the framework within which responsible economic action is meaningful. Production and consumption are not acts that have meaning in themselves; they only take on meaning when a respect for others and for nature is first present.

Many Christians get very upset about sexual misdeeds and other sins that lie completely on the individual level. Why is it, in your opinion, that the dangers of technology and economism, which threaten entire societies, are so often overlooked?

It may just be a matter of getting used to things. The Old Testament gives us a basic rule that applies here, as I see it, namely, that man always bears the image of the god he serves. We read that those who make idols grow to be like them, and so do all who trust in them (Psalm 115: 8). It's possible that because of this - I'm expressing myself carefully here - man might begin to feel at home in a technologized society and hardly feel this as a reduction of his own humanity. There are many workers who do not experience the monotonous repetition in their work as a problem at all and do not raise the question whether work like theirs is worthy of man. This feeling of familiarity, which has arisen from many generations of trust that science, technology, and the increase of economic prosperity will guarantee that everything will be in order, will certainly not leave people unaffected in their day to day behaviour and will begin to shape them. In itself I don't find this strange.

But it is still a painful experience that when there are protests about the way things are going, the Christians usually lag far behind and fail to utter any prophetic word!

I agree fully, and it bothers me too. That's one of the reasons why I insist on speaking of the solidarity of guilt. It's simply not true that the humanists in the west are the ones who have all of this on their conscience. The way the Puritans and also our Calvinistic forefathers understood the Bible and its command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it was sometimes closer to the humanistic drive to dominate everything than to the biblical idea of stewardship.

How did you arrive at the idea of the solidarity of guilt?

Not only was I brought up in a christian family, but after my years as a student and my military service, I would up at the Abraham Kuyper Foundation. Later in my life I continued to move within the framework of christian organizations. Now I'm teaching at a christian university - the Free University of Amsterdam. I experience all these christian forms of life as unspeakably valuable because they create an awareness that scientific research and political work are not neutral areas of life but are bound up in a direct way with christian faith. Thus there is no need to build a bridge between the christian faith and political convictions, for the connection is already there. It's only a question of which belief you begin with in politics and science.

But the element of sin has also played a role in all the activities of christian organizations. There was a feeling of having arrived, as though the fact that we are Christians means that whatever we come up with is better than what others achieve. In any event, the word "christian" was misused by many to their own advantage.

This often happened in election campaigns in the Netherlands, when the word “christian” was sometimes used in the same way that the Israelites hoped to make use of the Ark of God in battle against the Philistines. There’s no getting around the fact that the christian political parties - and I’m not excluding what I did while I was in politics - have helped to orient government policy and action very much toward economic goals.

My point is that from the outset a Christian must make it clear in his conduct that he is aware that he is also guilty of this sort of thing, because any attempt to maintain the contrary would fail to conceal his guilt anyway. It is only in the recognition of brokenness that the finger pointing to answer outside yourself becomes visible.

Surely recognizing brokenness is the very least you could say about the solidarity of guilt. Doesn’t it go further?

Certainly! What hits me so hard when I read the parable of the good Samaritan is the crucial question, “Who is my neighbour?” Who belongs to the circle of those whom I am obliged to love as neighbours? Jesus’ answer to this question was the story of the man who was robbed, beaten, and left lying at the side of the road. At the end of the story Jesus changed the question. He didn’t ask, “Whom must I regard as my neighbour?” Instead he asked, “Who was a neighbour to this man?” Thus the question of who my neighbour might be is not to be answered by me but by people who are in a difficult situation. This means that if someone lives in poverty or is lonely or is exploited or suffers injustice and looks to me for help, he then becomes my neighbour.

This is a very fundamental idea, for it breaks through our own ideas of solidarity, which often contain nothing more than a substitute lovecommandment, enjoining us to love those who are neighbours to us, i.e. people who are white like us, people who are in business like us, people Nyho are workers like us, and so forth. But the love-commandment which Christ gave us begins where our feelings of sympathy end. This is one of the cardinal points in being a follower of Christ. Christ died for people who were godless, who hated him and fled him. Thus if someone who professes to be a Christian establishes circles of solidarity in the world on the basis of his feelings of sympathy, he is not acting as a Christian at all. A Christian is supposed to be a neighbour to people who have a hard time of it, people in developing countries, people with no pressure groups to support them.

To me it sounds somewhat programmatic to declare that by definition our solidarity extends only to the oppressed in society. Couldn’t these people address a declaration of solidarity to us as a group too?

No, it’s just the other way around. Let’s start right at home, with people who are lonely and think to themselves, “I would just love to have a talk with so-and-so once.” Usually we know quite well who these people in our own surroundings are. They are people to whom we could mean something, people waiting to be approached. Such people then become our neighbours. In our society there are so many people who are having problems with their businesses or who have incomes below the poverty line. These people have also become our neighbours. I’m a member of a church committee working for aid to Bangladesh. We have adopted a number of congregations in Bangladesh and established ties between them and congregations here in the Netherlands. It’s an attempt to open up communication between the two sides and create channels for assistance. Schools and bridges are being built, and direct contacts are being made. I find it significant that in such a way the choice between neighbours far away and our own interests can be actualized.

In what you say I still see something of the thinking of marxist theology, in which Jesus is the model for revolution. Jesus spent his time with whores and tax-collectors, and therefore we should do the same. Furthermore, your view of this solidarity is left hanging within the sphere of western initiative.

Indeed it's also possible to go wrong by expecting deliverance or salvation from a structural transformation of society. That too is a religion. But I have something different in mind. I find the way Paul talks about slavery very instructive. Slavery is a human relationship that does not fit in with the gospel. When one person is the property of another person, this violates what God intended in creating human beings to live side by side. In the letter to Philemon, Paul turns the property relation upside down when he makes it clear that the slave's master is in turn Christ's slave and that the slave is a victor in Christ. Thus a person who serves someone else is above him in a certain respect.

The practice of slavery is questioned here in a radical way. Paul does not do so by way of a simple command that would put a stop to the practice of slavery for a while. Such intervention would not succeed in destroying the institution of slavery, for the way a society operates is a function of what the people of that society think and believe. No, slavery is questioned here in such a way that its very existence is fully understood to be an impossibility. Every domineering feature is removed from the relation between master and slave, which is still maintained formally.

I believe that if our society is transformed and private property is replaced by collective property while our hearts remain exactly the same, the same hardness of heart will come to expression in what we make of the transformed society. Thus in the Soviet Union, which is a society with collective property, we see a pursuit of economic progress that has been called a "deification of the growth rate." I believe that the structure of the economic order in itself is no guarantee of the goals pursued. If you believe that changes in structure will bring about a better society, then you're a structuralist. I don't mean to imply that structural changes aren't necessary. On the contrary, they may be urgently needed, but the important thing is to remember that people will create a society in accordance with their own ideas, and that taking these ideas away often does not change people at all.

How do you view the future of christian politics?

I believe that the challenge of our time in the area of politics is to make the meaning of the gospel visible anew for this generation. The exciting thing is that politicians in our time are no longer mesmerized by short-term problems and particular, technical details of legislation: central questions about the future of the western world are being discussed. Thus when a christian political party that takes the gospel seriously - which is an indispensable condition - faces the question of what man's future will be in a commercialized and technologized world, it will have to choose particular points to focus on. This does not mean that it must draw up a program that makes it clear how the entire world is to be perfected, but it does mean that it must be able to point out the areas where things have gone all wrong. From there it will have to try to show how liberating and redemptive the Kingdom of Christ really is. For me, christian politics in our time means a politics that dares to think and act in the light of the last things and the return of Christ. Therefore christian politics also means struggling against all efforts to close society off or rigidify it, which includes fighting the tyranny of the powers we have made into independent forces.

From the interview by M. de Klijn in the booklet *Christenen Doorgelicht* published by the Stichting Interlektuur.

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