

NEW EXODUS SERIES

A CHRISTIAN POLITICAL OPTION

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Introduction

The editors of Wedge Publishing Foundation have begun publishing the New Exodus Series to encourage the growth of a grass roots Christian social consciousness in Canada and the United States, and hopefully in other English-speaking countries. The books published in this series will be written by scholars, journalists and activists in economics, politics and social work.

The first book of the New Exodus Series is *A Christian Political Option* by Bob Goudzwaard. It was first published in 1969 on the 90th anniversary of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) in The Netherlands. Thus it represents one contribution in the long history of Christian political reflection and action in Dutch evangelical circles; this history of Christian action was begun in 1830 by Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and politically organized by Abraham Kuyper, the leader of the Dutch reformation, in 1879. The level of discussion, the sophistication of approach, and the assumption that a Christian political option is possible will no doubt amaze many readers in the English-speaking world. Until recently there has been little historical evidence for or possibility of self-consciously Christian political thought and action in our countries.

Dr. Bob Goudzwaard was educated at the Rotterdam School of Economics. From 1959 to 1967 he was a staff member of the Abraham Kuyper Foundation, a research centre sponsored by the ARP. Later he served a four-year term in the Dutch Parliament in The Hague. In 1971 he became professor of economic theory and policy at the Free University in Amsterdam. His latest book, *Non-Priced Scarcity*, deals with the ecological costs of industrial pollution which fall outside the marketplace pricing system, and hence must be paid by the public through other means. The richness of Goudzwaard's experience and insight as a Christian political economist informs the pages of *A Christian Political Option*. Wedge Publishing Foundation is grateful to the central council of the Anti-Revolutionary Party for a grant helping to make possible the English edition of this book.

Robert Lee Carvill

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Toronto, Canada

I. A NECESSARY RISK

[1] This book is about politics. More precisely, it attempts to deal with Christian politics. This subject, because of its vastness and mobility, reminds one of a turbulent ocean or a troubled sea.

To begin with, a multitude of problems confronts us with the mere mention of the word 'politics'. For politics, which can be roughly described as every more or less systematic use of governmental power or influence, is not only practiced on different levels - local, regional, national, supra-national - but is present in many diverse areas such as the social, cultural, economic, etc.

Moreover, there are many different forms of governmental interference. A government can use direct means of force, but also indirect ones. The latter are present, for instance, in budgetary and monetary policy as weapons in the battle against inflation and unemployment. A government can prohibit, but it can also persuade; it can order, but it can also stimulate. Finally, governmental decisions can be made in a variety of ways. They can be made dictatorially or democratically. They can be arrived at by the government alone or in conjunction with, for example, industrial organizations. A political decision can be subject to external pressures. And this by no means exhausts the possibilities. In short, politics is certainly not a placid, well-organized stage presentation. At first glance it looks more like a confused, multi-coloured carnival procession, though of a notably more serious character. It should be apparent that the multi-coloured nature of politics makes every publication on the subject somewhat of a gamble. This risk applies even more to the actual practice of politics. The political arena is so complex and demands knowledge of so many different factors and circumstances, that one can easily "miss the mark" in one's decisions. Political mistakes are frightening because politics decisively influences the lives of millions. Hence politics, whether in word or deed, is always a very risky undertaking.

Christian politics can miss the mark

In this publication, however, we are not just concerned with politics in general but particularly with Christian politics. This puts our theme in double jeopardy!

[2] For we must honestly admit that there have been many attempts to translate and articulate the message of the gospel for political life attempts which

were obvious failures. Often conclusions squarely contradicting each other have been drawn from the Bible. Appealing to the Bible, one person would defend the perpetuation of existing authority structures and property relationships while another would propose changes in these relationships. One person would describe colonialism as a Christian national calling in the light of the Bible while another would, on the basis of that same Bible, reject colonialism as anti-Christian. After so much confusion, where do we get the audacity to posit a relationship between politics and gospel? Hasn't it been conclusively shown that the Bible is an insufficient guide for communally conceived Christian political action? These questions become even more serious when we consider that in this area as well failure on our part can have very frightening consequences. In addition to damaging the lives of many citizens, wrong conclusions may also harm the cause of the gospel. When we propagate as Christian a political system which is unjust, we may become guilty of forever estranging people from the gospel. Then we become a roadblock between them and Christ with our so-called Christian politics.

These questions aren't rhetorical. If we disregard them because of their potentially serious consequences, we court disaster both for ourselves and others. A so-called 'Christian' politics which proceeds from a matter-of-fact faith or from a feeling of self-satisfaction will most certainly lead to a total fiasco. If that is the case we may indeed go forth with the Bible as Israel did long ago with the ark; but we'll lose both the battle and our link with the gospel.

An unavoidable gamble

Political activity as well as political reflection is thus a serious matter not only for ourselves but also for others. And it becomes even more serious when we try to engage in it from out of a biblical perspective. Aren't these tempting reasons to leave political thinking and acting to others?

This is an understandable reaction. But it doesn't answer the questions of whether we are *capable* of acting and thinking politically, nor the equally important question of whether we can escape doing so. The latter question can only be given a negative answer because no matter how we twist or turn, politics remains one of the constant expressions of daily life. Whether we like it or not, politics concerns all of us. Some as citizens, others as government officials. Politics is *one* of the ways in which we as people depend on and relate to each other. Whether we like it or not, we bear co-responsibility for one [3] another's lot and thus for the structuration of our society. Even if we are not concerned with politics, politics is concerned about us. That is why head-in-the-sand politics is still a very real form of politics - and an

extremely bad form at that.

No one can avoid the challenge of responsible political engagement, not withstanding all our past failings and shortsightedness. The challenge of political action based on the gospel remains for the Christian. While we may not superficially rid ourselves of the problems just posed, there is the undeniable fact that the gospel proclaims itself as a Word for the world: as Word that affects and desires to redeem all our cultural activities. Therefore it is simply impossible to be a Christian and to simultaneously deny the relevance of this Christianity to political life. To put it differently: even if we aren't concerned with the gospel in politics the gospel is concerned about our political activities. Christ has redeemed our *total* existence and re-directed it to God.

A dated mission

A tension results between our failure in politics on the one hand, and our task in politics on the other; a tension - an unmistakable tension - that becomes even more severe when we take up this task in the light of the gospel. When we approach our political task more concretely in the following chapters, we may not ignore this tension by attempting to escape to an idealized picture of Christian politics that bears no relationship to the concrete world. Hence we'll begin with an overview - necessarily in very broad terms - of the most important political problems, directions, and conceptions of our age. Chapter II will focus on the most important contemporary political choices; Chapter III will discuss political directions such as socialism, liberalism, communism and pragmatism; Chapter IV will contain comments on political questions in light of the proclamations of the Second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches. This exploration of the current scene will serve as a backdrop for developing the contours of an effective Christian political program.

II. CURRENT POLITICAL PROBLEMS

[5] Any serious political observer is impressed by both the great diversity of developments and their seemingly strong internal regularity and consistency. Politics operate in a specific situation; and it often appears as though these given situations contain the entire series of political decisions which subsequently must or will be taken. The best politician then seems to be the person who has the proper 'feel' of a given situation, who is 'in touch', and who can almost automatically execute the action which the situation *itself* demands.

This view of politics seems to correspond with the facts, and appeals to many in our pragmatistic age. If politics is merely an exercise of filling in the blanks with that which the facts (*pragma* = fact) themselves demand, then any discussion about principles and convictions is redundant nonsense and irrelevant bombast. It is the primary purpose of this chapter to illuminate, with the aid of a series of political problems, that one who holds this viewpoint in politics is being deceived by mere appearance. This illumination is entirely necessary because deception by appearance is a real danger in politics. Political activity dictated by what the situation itself seems to 'demand' amounts to nothing less than an abandonment of our specific political calling. Such a calling isn't a matter of merely following events; it's a matter of shaping these events.

Political determinants

What are some of the political determinants, or defining factors which seemingly dictate, in advance, solutions to just about every political problem? Without striving for completeness, the following appear to be the most important determinants:

1. Increasing production and income in western nations, and the resulting gulf which is increasing between rich and poor countries.
2. Increasing population, both nationally and internationally.
3. Increasing technical knowledge, and in connection with this:
 - a. Increasing growth in size and power formation in the economic sphere.
 - b. Increasing influence of the means of communication and possibilities of national and international contact, e.g. in the relationship between East and West.
 - c. Increasing threat of war.
- [6] d. Increasing education and an accentuated struggle for co-determination

and a voice in the decision-making process (for instance, on the part of employees in various business enterprises).

The influence these factors have on many political decisions, especially in the area of socio-economic policy, at first appear to be totally determinative. A few questions may clarify this. Doesn't the increasing population of a country necessarily lead to a space shortage, and hence to a policy directly oriented towards the preservation and maximum use of land? And in the face of an ever increasing national income, isn't it inescapable that we should strive for a further shortening of the work week? And doesn't the advance of modern means of communication and the development of international trade spontaneously lead to a search for supra-national forms of governmental influence and to a decreased significance of national borders? And don't we discover in these same factors why the economic systems on both sides of the iron curtain increasingly resemble each other, despite differences of opinion about economics and politics? And isn't it inescapable that the increased struggle for co-determination will in the long run result in more participation of employees in the shaping of employers' policies? Questions like these can be multiplied.

However, when we subject this kind of approach to a closer scrutiny, we must be especially critical on two counts.

First, when these influences (increasing population, production, knowledge, etc.) are at work, they still in no way give a decisive answer to the way in which one should react to these influences politically. When, for example, the population in a country increases and private space decreases, a policy of land control is indeed inescapable. But more than one direction can be given to this policy, and a conscious human choice between alternatives is necessary. Similar criticism applies to the other questions posed.

More important, however, all the determining factors which we mentioned are a lot less unalterable than they first appear. Or to put it differently: even factors such as increase in production or expanding technical knowledge are dependent upon human, and hence political, will and shaping. Each of these factors contains the necessity of human choice, a choice which involves man's view of himself and the world - a choice, moreover, which always has a political dimension. Closer observation should clarify this.

Increasing national income

It is beyond dispute that real national income - each citizen's buying power in obtaining goods and services has been increasing on [7] a more or less regular basis in most western nations. But it is a prime political choice what rate of increased

production is desirable, and in which way the increased national income is used.

With respect to the tempo of increased production the question arises whether one should not settle for a lower increase in production for the sake of preserving a purer environment (air, water, soil). Further, the question may also be posed if it is perhaps not necessary to slow down economic growth at home for the sake of economic growth in developing nations. Finally, one might ask whether a slowdown in the increase of real national expenditures may not be necessary in order to control inflationary tendencies in the economy.

With respect to the utilization of increasing national income, we should not only pose the question as to whether the distribution of incomes is just (for increased income is the fruit of rising production), but we should also face an equally important question: through which channels should increased income flow? Here we find at least five possibilities or combinations of possibilities:¹

1. The possibility of increasing private income and spending (the U.S.A. variant).
2. The possibility of increasing social welfare benefits and subsidies (the welfare state variant).
3. The possibility of increasing government spending on housing, highways, and education (the public sector variant).
4. The possibility of increasing military spending (the armament variant).
5. The possibility of increasing spending and investment in developing nations (aid to developing countries variant). This way the gap between the poor and rich countries could gradually be reduced.

Of course, a government in a non-totalitarian society does not have complete control over all these options. But that doesn't mean that it isn't repeatedly and inescapably confronted with the question of whether and how to influence rising production and spending. And in this choice a fundamental and underlying view of government, of man, and of society always plays a role, whether this is admitted or not.

Increasing population

At first glance population increase seems to be a factor which presents itself to a government as a fixed fact. Yet even here there is an element of political choice.

1. In giving aid to developing countries it is an important question whether or not one should stimulate or subsidize birth control [8] campaigns. Any answer to this question obviously contains elements of a world view.

¹W. W. Rostrow, *The Stages of Economic Growth [: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960)]. London, 1960.

2. A noticeable increase in government spending on medical facilities and traffic safety can reduce the mortality rate. How far should this increase be extended?
3. Should the 'pill' be distributed free under the provisions of public health insurance schemes?
4. Even though one is forced to reckon with national growth figures at least to some extent, this does not determine regional population growth rates. To what extent and with what instruments must a government follow a policy of population distribution, especially in the interests of regions which have fallen behind economically?
5. What policy should be followed with respect to emigration, immigration, loss of skilled manpower to other countries, and use of unskilled foreign laborers?

Increasing technical knowledge

Political choice accompanies the growth of technical knowledge. It is possible, for example, for a government to emphasize or de-emphasize the growth of technical knowledge. Moreover, the question presents itself whether the direction of study and research is to be determined solely by industry, or whether it is to be partially channelled or wholly assumed by the government itself. Of even greater import is the question of the proper political response to the encroaching automation of the production processes. The opportunity for industrial employment in some industrialized nations - expressed by the number of employed people is already steadily declining, while industrial production is still increasing. How can we compensate for this loss of employment opportunity? Is it perhaps desirable to greatly reduce the number of working hours? And how can we make certain that man can really live as man in the next few decades, and not stand lonely and hostile before an ever-increasing technology? These questions clearly imply political choices and thus exceed the boundaries of purely technical answers. When these questions are asked and answered, a certain view of man emerges. Even in the last third of the twentieth century 'man does not live by bread alone'.

Increasing power formation in economic life

Technological advance undeniably implies an ever larger scale of operation in the economic sector, and hence the formation of larger control and management units. Amalgamation has developed in several branches of the economy, along with the powerful stimulation of demand for the brand name products through advertising and sales promotion. For increasingly expanded industrial producers need to be [9] assured of a stable and growing market to be able to plan future

production.² Hence economic power expands in breadth as well as depth: modern corporations are capable of influencing and shaping the consumption patterns of the consumer, and of us all!

Undoubtedly a political system which allows itself to be governed by these developments might well be a very bad form of government. A passive governmental attitude might mean that in the long run the needs and behavior patterns of the citizens become more and more 'commercialized'. This might well lead a society to be oblivious to real needs outside of the marketplace: in western nations to the need for clean air, fresh water, adequate transportation, and a good educational system; and in developing countries to the many real unsatisfied economic needs. Moreover, a passive governmental attitude can easily lead to yet another danger: the spheres of influence of business and government can become so tightly interwoven that it becomes almost impossible for the government to act as anything but an extension of industrial interests in employment problems and related labor issues.

Here again therefore we are confronted with genuine political choices. What position is the government to take with respect to the increasing influence of advertising in society? Should advertising expenditure be curbed, perhaps partially bent in another direction? How should a government interact with employer and employee organizations? Should each amalgamation and every form of economic concentration be allowed to go unchallenged by the government? Should economic policy indeed be directed in such a way that the government accepts more and more direct responsibility for the fate of individual business concerns (which is the tendency e.g. of French economic policy)?

We need not argue that every answer that is given to questions such as these is in the last analysis inspired by an underlying and basic vision regarding the duties and powers of government and industry. For example, those who advocate, with the English economist Crosland, that modern government cannot and may not rule without receiving the prior consent of the major interest groups for its policies, in fact replace the idea of the Just State (German: *Rechtsstaat*) with that of the consensus state in the socio-economic realm. The basis for governmental policy is no longer the impartial promotion of the public interest, but a striving for mutual agreement between the government and private interest groups. And this is a choice which cannot be justified with an appeal to factual development which supposedly

² . See here especially J.K. Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*. Boston, 1968.

demands it. The politician has to make a choice and take complete political responsibility.

[10]

Increasing confrontation between East and West

A similar approach can be taken in regard to increasing confrontation between East and West - a confrontation in fact between two distinct social systems. Undoubtedly advancing technology and a resulting expanded scale in economic life are intensifying this confrontation. But this doesn't mean that in the long run the societies of East and West will become basically similar. Whoever assumes this overlooks the fact that such a similarity will be possible only if the West makes a prior political choice, viz. that ultimately the norm of maximal economic growth is decisive in the shaping of society, and that in the confrontation between East and West our major concern is to stay ahead of the Iron Curtain countries in the rate of economic growth. However, if one holds the view that the freedom of enterprise and industrial development has an independent significance apart from their economic results, then one has introduced a norm for shaping a society which may lead to lasting differences with a country directed by the collectivistic spirit. It should be evident that on this basis the confrontation between East and West will be more fundamental than that of a purely economic contest.

Even in the economic confrontation between East and West one cannot escape a political choice.

Increasing threat of war

It is undoubtedly true that there are many factors which heighten the threat of war. Besides modern armament technology, we could mention present racial tensions, the spreading of nuclear arms across the globe, the prosperity gap between rich and poor countries, the presence of a militant China and the great military power blocks. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these factors by themselves make the coming of a new world war inevitable. The waging of war is always a human decision, a conscious political act for which one remains fully responsible under all circumstances.

Moreover, the element of political choice is present in the ways men try to neutralize or remove the factors and influences which might lead to war. Should a new world-wide legal order be promoted? If our answer is affirmative, how can this be accomplished? Should NATO change its basic character; and if so, how? Should

aid to developing countries be channelled through existing indigenous regimes? And how can further proliferation of nuclear weapons be prevented?

Besides all these questions there are problems of an even more profound nature, which are intimately related to the view one holds concerning the problem of war itself. Such a view can never be said to be inspired only by the facts. Some problems here are: whether one [11] may ever be the first to resort to arms in case of a conflict; whether one is justified in using nuclear weapons defensively against a nuclear attack; and whether there is a connection - and if so, of what nature - between warmongering, apostasy, and spiritual disintegration in a given society. The element of an independent and personal political judgment is always present in attitudes toward individual wars (compare for example the conflict in Viet Nam with the one concerning Israel).

In some cases, for example, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a specific view of life can also play a role; in this case the view that the people and the land of Israel were joined together by God's own hand in days of long ago.

Concluding remarks

I've placed the emphasis quite strongly on the problems of socio-economic policy because socio-economic policy seems largely to be determined and developed by a great number of given, external factors. Hopefully it has been demonstrated that in this sector of socio-economic policy, extremely important political choices present themselves - especially today - which cannot and may not be ignored.

And if this is true for an area seemingly as pre-determined as the socio-economic realm, then obviously it holds to an even greater degree for the non-socio-economic elements of governmental policy. For in these other areas there are many more political directions. For example: in important aspects of foreign affairs, in policies concerning art and culture, in policies concerning the physical and spiritual health of the populace.

III. MOVEMENTS OF OUR TIMES

[13] To properly appreciate the tasks and possibilities of Christian political action requires a basic knowledge of the political conceptions of our time. Now I'll briefly give a rough sketch of some of these.

Today's socialism

Today's socialism is clearly distinguishable from that of before the second

world war; and development did not exactly come to a halt after the war either. Therefore only a snapshot impression is possible. Today's socialism basically shares these conceptions with its earlier predecessor:

1. It views the interest of individual men to be largely an extension of the interests of the national community, and hence puts the most emphasis on these latter interests.
2. It desires to give context to individual civil rights especially through accentuating the economic prospects and possibilities opened up for each person by the national community.

Besides this, one could point to a stress on the interests of the employees, and to the ready acceptance of ordering and planning techniques by administrative bodies of the national government for the sake of improving the society of the future, a society which is structured in harmony with the major themes just mentioned.

These major themes of socialism also come to expression in the way concepts and ideas are used. Freedom for socialism is primarily a freedom from coercive economic situations (such as poverty, unemployment), and is to be brought about by the (national) community. When socialism speaks of justice it means above all a socio-economic justice (equal economic opportunities), which should be brought about via the community. Other ideas and concepts, such as responsibility, equality, 'public interest', etc., are provided with similar accents by socialism. In all this an original element of the Marxist-socialist faith, though considerably watered down, is still expressed, namely, that for the community as a whole actual salvation and real happiness will dawn through the economic reshaping of society. For Marx this meant the nationalization of all private means of production.

[14] Of this original tenet today's socialism often retains only very weak remnants, which come to expression in the above mentioned 'themes'. Moreover, we could characterize the specific development within socialism as a movement from dogmatism to opportunism. This comes to expression in two ways:

1. The accents on 'community' and 'economics' are becoming less pronounced. Present day socialism increasingly concedes a position of independence to the individual person and his civil rights within the community.
2. Socialism has become very flexible concerning the concrete paths which are to be travelled in order to arrive at a better society. It has become a matter of secondary importance to the socialist whether one must take the road of socialization, or that of direct interference and regulation of existing

structures of authority, or that of exercising influence through comprehensive intervention at strategic points, or perhaps that of monetary control.

It is noteworthy, however, that throughout the western world new progressive movements within socialism have again put a stronger emphasis on certain concrete directions (e.g. nationalization), and hence have started to view the manner of intervention as less secondary. This is a reaction against the present opportunistic and even bourgeois tendencies in the older socialist movements and undoubtedly expresses the current emphasis on 'clarity' in politics.³

Today's libertarianism

Liberalism and socialism originally were at opposite poles. Today's liberalism is but a pale shadow of yesterday's. The traditional themes of liberalism were:

1. A strong emphasis on the worth of the individual (not the community).
2. A strong emphasis on the maintenance of formal civil rights (property rights, freedom of contract, free enterprise, freedom of employment, freedom of consumption).

These themes are still noticeable today, especially in North America, where the tenets of classical liberalism are at times given a new name: libertarianism. To the real liberal, freedom is above all the freedom of the individual to exercise his own rights without hindrance. Justice then means that each individual is granted the unobstructed utilization of his rights. The liberal tends to apply these [15] themes to all political concepts and ideas. Concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, responsibility, and so on, are of course nothing but empty cartridges which always derive their content from an external source, i.e., from an underlying commitment to a world view.

At their deepest level these themes of liberalism are anchored in a conscious commitment to a humanist faith. Classical liberalism believed unconditionally in the right of 'man as individual' to be a law unto himself, just as traditional socialism asserted this concerning 'man in community'. The old liberalism was rooted in the belief that an ideal society would flourish spontaneously if only government would restrict itself to guaranteeing each individual his 'rights'. To this faith the old liberal clung with heart and soul.

The weakening of dogma, however, has permeated liberalism perhaps even more than it did socialism, notably in western Europe. Today's liberals plead for a

³ The "Waffle Wing" of the socialist New Democratic Party in Canada is an example of this reaction.

'just' mean between the interests of the individual and those of society. Consequently they can go in almost any direction, with a frequent appeal to reason and common sense. They often are opportunist in practice, although the old themes come strongly to the fore every now and then, especially in times of crisis. The liberals still present opposition to socialism most clearly in the capital-labor issue. From the very start socialism made the interests of labor its first concern, while liberalism still stresses the interests of capital. The difference between socialism and liberalism came out quite clearly in the Netherlands a few years ago, when the universal issue of advertising on television had to be decided upon. While the liberal party clearly favored subjecting television programs to 'commercializing' influence by means of advertising, the socialist party opposed this trend. We noted above that in the socialist camp there is a new swing to the original tenets of radical socialism. A similar phenomenon can be detected in the liberal camp. While in a number of countries the basic tenets of classical liberalism are hardly adhered to in a dogmatic manner and in the United States the very term 'liberal' is rejected by those who most tenaciously defend these tenets. In recent years there is a distinct revival on this side of the political spectrum which often goes under the name of Neo-liberalism. Proponents of this revival can be found especially in Germany and the United States where the writings of Ludwig von Mises, Wilhelm Röpke, F.A. Hayek, and Milton Friedman continue to be popular in certain circles. Neo-liberalism can briefly be described as that movement which demands a deep respect for the exercise of free economic competition. The government must respect this competition and encourage it as much as possible. When the results of this free competition lead to socially unacceptable consequences, the govern[16]ment may not for this reason interfere in the free market process. Instead, it must then pursue a social policy that does not affect this process.⁴

Today's communism

Today's communism is also very different from that of earlier years. This is as true of national communism (Russia, Italy, Yugoslavia) as it is of international communism, including China. The most important points of difference are:

1. Communism today (following Lenin) puts much more stress on the influence of man's own action in the development of society. Marx was of the opinion that this influence is extremely limited. For him it was not man but the law of

⁴ . In the United States, The Foundation for Economic Education plays a significant role in popularizing the tenets of Neo-liberalism through its monthly publication, [*The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty*](#).

nature which governed societal development in a dialectical way.

2. Today's communism views the laboring masses not as a single whole, but distinguishes between those who have arrived at revolutionary self-consciousness (the party) and the rest of the laboring masses.
3. Today's communism no longer views revolution as the only possible way to build a different society. A capitalistic society can change into a communistic one by way of a democratic majority in the western parliaments. For emerging nations, however, 'revolution' is still held to be the best method, which is to be preceded by 'national wars of liberation'.
4. In opposition to Marx, communism accepts the continuing existence of a powerful state as the intermediate phase between a socialistic and a completely communistic society. Russia hopes to arrive at the latter around 1980.
5. Today's communism no longer has a completely closed world view in which all sciences have to be based on the communistic system. According to contemporary communist doctrine, linguistics and formal logic have been set free from the demands of the class struggle.
6. Today's communism accepts certain 'capitalistic' elements in the economic sphere, such as a limited striving for profit in industry, a certain measure of free price formation, and a very limited private ownership of agricultural land.
7. [17] Communism deems the transition from capitalism to communism also possible in principle in non-industrialized societies (in contradistinction to Marx). Chinese communism, however, carries this notion much further than its Russian counterpart.
8. Lenin launched the dogma of 'peaceful co-existence' between the socialistic and non-socialistic peoples (not: states!). There exists several important differences between Russian and Chinese communism in the interpretation of this dogma. Chinese communism stays closer to Lenin's original - certainly not 'pacifist' - intention.

All these changes and shifts constantly evolve, especially in Russian communism. Hence, observers expect that communism will continue to free itself more and more of dogmatic elements.

Of course these developments may not tempt us to think that communism is a bankrupt affair and a 'faith' which never found acceptance among the great masses

of people. These misconceptions are fueled by propaganda in the western countries. For the majority of the Russian and Chinese population, communism is a living faith. The educational and communication systems take care that this majority retains its confidence in communism. The developments in the West, especially in the economic, social and spiritual areas, are carefully followed, for the heartfelt conviction still exists that the capitalistic system will someday completely collapse and the West will also accept communism. It would be foolish on our part to accept the assumption that this expectation can never come true.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is on the increase, everywhere, both within existing political parties and through the formation of new ones. Perhaps most countries in the West will grow towards a party system such as the one found in the U.S. There we find two large parties facing each other (Republicans and Democrats) which are both strongly pragmatic in orientation. What is pragmatism?

- a. In its most simple sense, 'pragmatism' indicates a movement which desires to be led by facts (*pragma* = fact) alone, without the so-called 'bias' of specific convictions or principles. Purely on the grounds of a healthy and businesslike weighing of facts one attempts to arrive at a political position.
- b. On a somewhat deeper level the word 'pragmatism' is used to indicate that movement in western thought which denies that there is one norm for truth which binds all people. Only that can be 'true' and 'correct' which is useful for the factual, practical goals which one has established. If a certain pronouncement or measure brings [18] you closer to this practical goal, that pronouncement or measure is true and correct. For example, the American philosopher William James, the founder of pragmatic philosophy, was of the opinion that it is true that God exists, not because he 'believed' this, but because he found that people who believed in God felt more secure in life. Religion proves to be useful, and therefore is true.

This second form of pragmatism has deeply penetrated the academic disciplines today. In many contemporary scientific publications the opinion is advanced, for example, that scientific definitions do not have to be 'objectively' true in the old-fashioned sense of the word. The only demand one can make of a definition is that it be 'workable' that it be 'useful' in the development of scientific research.

In the broader areas of western culture, pragmatism as an attitude towards life is in full advance. The question whether a certain action is morally or ethically

correct is asked less and less, and more and more people are only interested in what the practical effect of an action will be. If there is a desired effect, then an action causing it is declared to have been the correct action.

Up till now political pragmatism has presented itself in western Europe in the first, simpler form: an increasing number of politicians claim to be led by the facts alone. Closely connected with this is today's great emphasis on concrete points in political platforms; *how* the program itself is arrived at is held to be of little significance. Only concrete points on the program count; only they contribute to 'political clarity'. The clarity is not desirable that uncovers underlying motives; only that clarity is allowed which gives practical, factual results.

It's not enough to have political parties give lip service to norms and principles for action; when the only real yardstick of political action or movements is reduced to practical results, the heart has been cut out of political choice and responsibility.

The 'simple' form of pragmatism - taking its point of departure from 'facts' alone - is essentially untenable, as has already been shown above. For there is always the necessity of making political choices: in so-called 'factual' judgments and assessments we find that certain insights and motives always play a role, whether this is wanted or not, or whether one is conscious of it or not. Therefore the 'simple' form of pragmatism is inconsistent. Honesty *and* clarity demand that underlying motives be brought to light. And in the long run they do come to light. Then the 'simple' pragmatist has little choice: *either* he comes across with the honest admission that he also has firmly fixed motives and opinions, or he chooses his principles and motives to suit his practical actions. In the latter case his naive pragmatism - taking only [19] the facts into account - has grown into a consistent and complete pragmatic view of life.

Hence in the future any party should have to explain positions taken in its election platform. Take for example the pronouncement that it is desirable to maintain a 'reasonable balance between social justice and economic efficiency' when the distribution of income and wealth are considered. What is meant here by 'social justice'? Nearly every political party - conservative, liberal, socialist - is willing to refer to the concept of 'social justice' and others like it in its programs and platforms. But the point that must be stressed here - for the sake of necessary political clarity and credibility - is that a concept like 'social justice' can receive meaning and content only in terms of a basic and underlying view of man and society. If a political party doesn't provide clarity at this level, it will hardly be credible in executing its concrete

political program, since it will tend to shift arbitrarily and according to the needs of practical expediency from a liberal (libertarian) to a middle-of-the-road to a more socialistic motivation; on the other hand, pragmatic politics puts the cart before the horse: principles and underlying motivations are relied upon mainly for the convenience of getting a practical political program accepted.

It need not be elaborated here that consistent pragmatism is the fruit of a disintegrated humanism which has reasoned out of existence all norms and principles which might be binding on people. It seems liberating, but in fact one is subjected to the terrorism of practical goals, which at first are simply proposed but then canonized. These goals have then in effect become the 'new principles' for political and social action.

IV. CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL REFLECTION

[21] For the delineation of our own conception concerning Christian social reflection and action, it is important to pay some attention to developments in other Christian circles. Here we have in mind the on-going reflection within the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, especially the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council.

World Council of Churches

Concern by the World Council of Churches regarding the attitude of the Christian towards modern society goes back a long time. The concept of a 'responsible society' was already launched in 1948. The main thrust of this idea was that society should be founded on the liberty of people who perceive themselves to be responsible for justice and public order, and that those who possess political or economic authority in society are accountable to God and to the people whose welfare depends on their authority.

It must be pointed out that this idea of a 'responsible society' was not launched by the World Council of Churches as an idea to be agreed upon by Christians alone. It was intended as an idea which Christians and non-Christians could unite around.

We recognize in the background a strong Lutheran influence on the original thought climate of the Council. According to the two realm conception of Luther, the Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms: that of this world, and that of the kingdom of heaven. He shares his earthly citizenship with non-Christians; the same divine laws hold for Christian and non-Christian, and they can be understood and honoured equally by both. Thus the idea of a 'responsible society' is not thought to be specifically a Christian idea, but the formulation of a societal law around which all well-meaning people, regardless of their faith, can unite.

Reflection within World Council circles has not ceased, of course, since 1948. Following up the idea of a responsible society, much attention has been given in recent years to the necessity of social revolution. With this is meant not so much a seizure of political power, if necessary by violent means, but rather an imperative to rebuild the structure of society.

[22] This kind of thinking has grown out of two main sources. The first of these is the existing situation in many South American countries. There bitter

poverty goes hand in hand with the amassing of riches by the few - a disparity which is promoted by the large feudal estates that are still part of the life of Latin America. Many Christian democratic parties in South America correctly view a turnabout of present social structures as the only possibility for arriving at just relationships of income, property and power.

The second source is the situation of Christians behind the Iron Curtain. These Christians experience an immediate confrontation with communism, a system which has made a caricature of the Christian faith by representing it as the invention of capitalism. (Just in passing: this is a caricature for which 'official' Christianity in these countries has often given cause in the past, and continues to do so at times.) According to communism, capitalism utilizes the Christian faith as an ideology; that is to say: it uses Christianity as an instrument to draw the attention of the labouring classes and of the suppressed peoples away from their own situation of exploitation, by holding before their eyes a blessed future life in heaven (Cf. Marx's concept of religion as the 'opiate of the masses'). Christians behind the Iron Curtain correctly view it as their first task to break through this caricature of the Christian faith. And that's possible by making clear to the communists, with word and deed, that the Christian is genuinely able and willing to oppose the presence of injustice and warmongering in *this* world.

Hence especially these Christians behind the Iron Curtain stress the desirability of Christian reflection on the idea of revolution, of the lawful overturning of diseased and unjust social structures.⁵

The Second Vatican Council

The results of the Second Vatican Council in the area of reflection upon socio-economic and political problems are not as yet entirely clear. However, two approaches can be distinguished.

In the first place, more than ever before in Roman Catholic circles the council has given expression to the realization that the gospel has a significance far beyond typical ecclesiastical and religious affairs. The gospel is also a word for the world. It speaks to human society. Paragraph 13 of the Conciliar Statements indicates this clearly.

[23] The second approach, also expressed in paragraph 13, concerns the

⁵ . For more information the following publications of the World Council are very useful: *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World* (1966) [John C. Bennett, *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World: An Ecumenical Theological Inquiry* (Church and society series, No.1), London, SCM, 1966] and *The Uppsala Report 1968* [Goodall, Norman (ed)., *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth*

notion of the 'autonomy' or independence of the realm of temporal and secular matters. This secular or temporal realm is subject to its own laws which to a certain extent can also function outside of the gospel. An example of such 'autonomous' laws is rational insight, often referred to in popular parlance as common sense. The world of politics belongs to this autonomous realm. For this reason Christians and non-Christians can quite readily join hands in the world of politics, either by belonging to one political party or by engaging in common political action.

There is a certain tension between these two approaches. The second one is an obvious and systematic consequence of the classical nature-grace motive which has dominated Roman Catholic reflection about man and society since the middle ages. We would express the hope that the first approach will gradually receive greater attention and become dominant in the long run.

The development which can be noted in recent papal encyclicals is probably even more significant. *Mater et magistra*, *Pacem in terris*, *Populorum progressio* (which focuses on world poverty) can indeed be interpreted as an attempt to render the traditional static natural law concepts of Roman Catholic philosophy more *dynamic*, to make these concepts more relevant in an ever-changing social situation.

An example may clarify this. In traditional Roman Catholic thought the state has generally been viewed as the 'natural' head of society and as the protector of the public interest. In many instances this 'public interest', to be implemented by the state, was viewed as the sum or synthesis of the existing partial interests of the various groups in the nation. In practice, therefore, the politics of Roman Catholics often implied the protection of group interests in the determination of public policy. The content of public interest then amounts to a 'reconciliation' of the 'irreconcilable' partial interests. This approach can readily lead to middle-of-the-road politics. The tendency of the recent papal encyclicals, however, seems to break through all this because the traditional natural law notions are placed in an entirely new and dynamic setting. The most recent argument goes like this: the state must not primarily *protect*, but also dynamically *promote* the public interest; therefore some kind of world government is inevitably demanded for the future.

A similar change is apparent in the area of property rights. Traditionally, all existing property rights were defended as founded in 'nature', thus deserving universal recognition. Now the notion is defended that the universal right of individual property should be shared by all men of *all* races. [24]

Thus the ancient Roman Catholic conception of natural law is used today as

the basis and justification for a very progressive endeavor striving after global federalism, aid to developing nations and new property relations.

V. THE UNIQUE RADICALITY OF THE GOSPEL³

[25] The summations contained in the previous chapters of the most important contemporary political problems and currents have undoubtedly been rather incomplete. But in spite of incompleteness, the problems raised so far are already bewildering enough! We must not only take note of the present rapids in several social, technical, economical, cultural and philosophical streams, but also remember that a number of political choices and challenges are involved in navigating these rapids. The political action we advocate today will have inestimable consequences for the world of tomorrow. Political irresponsibility today means that we will face irreparable damage tomorrow.

This implies, however, that the tension between the imperative undertaking and the historical 'failing' in politics, as described in Chapter I, now reaches an almost unbearable intensity. It almost seems that evangelical political action can no longer provide responsible answers for all the challenges of today. Its answers apparently sufficed in an era in which the political scene could be reasonably surveyed, and in which questions such as the direction of education were primary. So now more than ever those who desire to consciously maintain the tie between the gospel and the practical political problems of the moment seem to run the risk of secularizing the gospel instead of performing a genuine service for political life.

Today those who see things this way really seem to be right. But among those who have learned to accept the gospel as a universal, abiding and up-to-date word for the world - not just for a personal 'salvation'! - there is resistance against this 'vision'; and correctly so. Could it be true that the gospel's sphere of influence decreases in direct proportion to the progress of human history? Then time would be mightier than the gospel; then the gospel would have to capitulate to history, and that is an unacceptable position. On the other hand, one has to concede that by merely rejecting this position the problems have in no way disappeared; in fact, they seem to have become more insoluble than before. For it is a *fact* that Christians have often failed in applying the gospel to politics - and it is also a *fact* that this failure can really only become more acute as political problems become complex and obtuse. Those who keep striving under these circum-[26]stances for a connection between gospel and politics seem moreover to take a burden upon themselves which has little

³ Editor's note: Goudzwaard' was here contributing to a discussion within the *AntiRevolutionaire Partij* concerning its Christian basis and founding vision.

of the joy of the gospel. For gospel means: glad tidings! How is it possible to escape this dilemma? If evangelical political action can exist, it should at the very best contain some of the joy of the gospel-but that joy seems so very far away.

With this observation a final judgment seems to have been pronounced upon any possible contemporary evangelical political activity. Yet this is not so. Rather, in the above judgment, sentence has been passed only upon the manner in which we ourselves tend to set and have set the problematics of evangelical politics in the past. Why is it that undertaking of evangelical political action seems often to be such a heavy and joyless business? Because in the usual approach Christian political action is preoccupied - though unintentionally - with what we Christians ourselves should do and could do. But a truly Christian politics stands under the banner of what the gospel does. For the Word of God is not a dead letter, but a living Spirit! Therefore, only politics which returns to what the gospel itself works in our hearts and in society can take the pressure off us.

To put it differently: political activity in which we see it as our task to bridge the 'gap' between the gospel and politics, has little to do with real Christian politics. Such political activity usually remains frozen in the depressive stage of doctrinal-legalistic politics and never reaches the 'light burden' stage of an evangelical politics - a politics in which there is indeed no trace whatever of the gospel's capitulation to history.

Derived principles

Before clarifying that last point, it would be well to point out that recognizing the gospel's own presence and living activity in the political sphere is not as easy as it might appear to many people. In fact it appears that many of the difficulties which Christians have experienced in biblical political reflection spring from an underestimation of this active role of the word of God. How often have people not tortured themselves to bridge the 'gap' between an ancient Bible and a complex of contemporary political realities! Some have attempted to build bridges by means of eternal principles and derived principles; but hardly had a 'derived' principle been constructed (free trade, rugged individualism, rejection of all birth control) before one had to break one's own principle in certain respects. More than this, the radius of activity of these principles turned out to be so limited that whole areas of political life were not touched by them at all - and hence these areas were relegated to bleak neutrality. In these political areas one often had to make do with the motto: relying on common sense.

[27] This weak spot in evangelical political reflection was thoroughly

exposed, especially from the vantage point of Christian liberalism (libertarianism). With justice these people could say: "You acknowledge that politics has become more 'secular' - to the extent that it is possible to directly apply the Bible only in certain areas. Then why don't you join a political party which will share your point of view on these secular problems? The other problems you could easily solve within, for example, an evangelical Christian 'work community' within the party." This was a reaction to which the fundamentalistic adherents of 'derived biblical principles' had, in fact, insufficient reply. All the more when one by one their 'derived principles', as all human ordinances, had to bite the dust under the pressure of changing circumstances. Only primarily evangelical notions, such as the value of Christian education or the realization that government had to be for the benefit of the people, remained.

The gospel as power

As indicated, there has been pain and difficulty in the past. Without judging deepest intentions and motives, one may still regret that many have had - and do have - too little eye for the work of the gospel itself. For was it not-and is it not typical of the approach of many Christians that the saw-and still see-the Bible as a book which can become of significance for politics only through their labour, thanks to their derivations and applications? And is it not this use of the Bible which creates the short-circuits with the concrete political problems of past and present?

The gospel, however, does not present itself as a passive dead book. The gospel speaks of itself in loaded terms: it is a power of God unto salvation, it is the sword of the Spirit which penetrates not only our political activities, but to the very heart of every man.

Therefore the basis of our Christian politics can never be our use of the gospel. Rather, it is the other way around: Christian evangelical politics comes into being when we let ourselves be used by the gospel.⁶ Evangelical politics does not rest on our active reaching out to God's Word, but on the active reaching out of

⁶ "Those who believe that truly scriptural principles for the state can be obtained solely from explicit Bible texts, base their beliefs on a completely wrong view of scripture. They merely see words, but forget that God's Word is Spirit and Power, and that this Word has to bear upon all of life. God's Word-revelation puts you to work. It wants to influence your whole existence, it wants to bring new life where death and spiritual laziness rule. You who'd like to take it easy hope the ripe fruits of God's Word-revelation will be given to you without any efforts on your part. But Christ Jesus tells you that you yourself have to bear fruit when the seed of God's Word has fallen in fertile soil". This is a translation of a passage from Herman Dooyeweerd *Vernieuwing en Bbezinning: om het reformatoische grondmotif* (1963) p.57 which, in the subsequent English translation *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options* Wedge 1979 is found at pp. 58-9.

God's Word to us and to the whole world.

[28] In this there is liberation - the joy of Christian politics. We don't really have to make sure anymore that the Bible will become significant in politics, for it has had that significance for a long time through the power of the Spirit of God everywhere in the world where the gospel has been proclaimed. And we don't have to supply the basis, the 'raison d'être' of Christian politics anymore. For it is also anchored in the working of the gospel itself. In politics the Word of God *itself* desires to make us mindful of what is evil, of what we should or what we shouldn't do.

Therefore in forming our political opinions we can rely on the gospel-even in the most difficult political problems. For it embraces no less than the whole world and does not even stop at the portals of our own hearts. It is present from the outset in every political situation.

All this does not mean, of course, that there is no such thing as failure in politics. But it does mean that our failures now stand in a different light. Even though we don't have to be afraid that the power of the gospel will desert us in our political activities - it is very well possible that we have deserted the gospel in many political decisions. This could happen, for example, when we prevent the power of the gospel from penetrating the ideas and concepts out of which we fashion political decisions. It also happens when we close our eyes to the ever-present choice with which the gospel confronts us and the world.

We will probably never completely escape failures of this kind. But at the same time it is true that we may never cite failure as an excuse. This is also the reason why in Chapter I we said without hesitation that in the tension between our failure and our task the latter has to triumph. For we can never hide behind this kind of failure in order to ignore our calling. We could, in a manner of speaking, no more easily stop our striving after Christian politics than we could stop being Christians.

Program

Something of a program emerges in the position which we chose a minute ago. We will develop this program in the following chapters because we must gradually choose concrete political positions. We must, however, at all costs avoid building towering Christian constructions on the basis of the odd Bible text. Then we would usurp the place of the gospel again, perhaps without even noticing it. The only right way to go about it would appear to be this: attempt to illustrate how the gospel itself, as a dynamic power, acts upon our own forming of political opinion, and upon the world around us.

[29] Christian politics comes into its own when we open ourselves up to the power of the gospel. It is not an artificial inflation of our own egos with the aid of a set of a-political, edifying niceties, but a spontaneous following of the gospel as it continually confronts us and others with a decisive choice in the midst of contemporary political problems: a choice between life and death, between hope and despair, between light and darkness.

This choice first touches us. In politics we shall have to choose between our self-chosen ideas and concepts and the 'charge', the content, which the gospel gives them. The gospel breaks right through our middle class ideas and thought patterns. What this should mean in politics will be the subject of the next chapter.

This choice also touches our relationship to our fellowmen. On this level the gospel is active as a message of peace, and as an answer to all forms of demonic power (Chapter VII).

Finally, this choice also touches the society we build as human beings. As much as we ourselves, the structures of society need to be submitted to the critical examination of the powerful word of God; for they are in their given forms a product of our (dirty) hands. If we protect society from this critical power of the gospel, we have in fact made it an idol. Therefore, on the level of the structuration of society, the gospel places a choice before us of what is and what ought to be (Chapter VIII).

A summary of the total working of the Word of God in politics is that it urges us to strive after a politics conceived in the radicality of the gospel. This gospel radicality is directed both at our hearts - breaking radically through our middle class ideas, concepts and motives - and at the society around us, whose very basis and root (*radix*) are subject to the testing power of that same gospel.

Before we start with this program, however, there is still a need for two introductory remarks. It is extremely revealing that the choice which the gospel demands of everyone in politics does not only confront non-Christians but also Christians. This is revealing because we are usually inclined to view ourselves in politics as the carriers of the gospel, who confront others with it, but who remain out of range ourselves for the most part. But all of us are confronted ever anew by the choice of the gospel. Christians are just as prone to choose evil as anyone else or as any other political movement. Hence a Christian political party never excels other parties simply by definition.

A second remark. The approach which we shall try to take - and it remains to be tried - excludes the giving of political recipes. What has to be done concretely in

each political situation remains a question of personal responsibility for the Christian politician. The intent of [30] this book is in fact no more - and should in our opinion be no less - than to aid others in their own, gospel-directed formation of contemporary political judgment.

This does not mean, however, that the significance of the gospel for politics would be reproduced sufficiently with the use of terms such as: Christianly inspired politics, or evangelically sensitive politics. The most important objection to this sort of thing is that it re-channels and narrows the significance of the gospel for politics to a purely subjective level, making it that which the Christian feels he can pick up for himself in the gospel. The objection grows even stronger when one's 'being inspired' is viewed as something which others have to accept as an unexplained given; when for others the content would already by definition be lifted above any kind of evangelical reflection and testing.

VI. SELECTION OF POLITICAL IDEAS

[31]

Ideas as empty cartridges

In Chapter III we already indicated that every political decision, no matter how complex or in what area, is always informed by certain ideas.

Politicians always justify their decisions; they regard such and such a measure desirable because it is just; because it promotes liberty; because it serves the common good; because it is demanded by public interest. But what liberty really is, or justice, or welfare is decided by every politician as it were, for himself. Such deciding is loosely connected with his total view of life.

All such concepts as liberty, justice, etc., are only clearinghouses for the deep convictions of each politician. Whether he wants to or not, his own perspective on life will break through into the world of practical politics because of the content which he gives to these ideas and concepts.

That we are not exaggerating is probably demonstrated most clearly through the following two quotations in which the name of the particular political conviction in question has been left out.

1. "'ISM' is the struggle trying to create the societal conditions that enable people to develop as freely as possible. Therefore we are first of all interested in the human personality."

2. "The highest goal of 'ISM' is to guarantee freedom for an unfolding of the

human personality, and to create the conditions for unlimited personality development. Thus 'ISM' sees true liberty in the most exalted sense of the word."

The first quote refers to liberalism; the second refers to communism, and is a quote from the Russian handbook, *Foundations of Marxism-Leninism*, 1962. These two quotations show most clearly that concepts like liberty, free development of the personality, etc., are often no more than empty cartridges, which receive their charge completely from the world view to which one adheres.

Which charge?

The importance of this observation is seen when one considers that concepts such as liberty, personality, well-being (shalom), etc., usually have a biblical, Christian origin. The Graeco-Roman civilization, for example, did not possess a real concept of liberty. The [32] western concept of freedom is in its origin a typical fruit of the gospel. Concepts such as these were for the most part foreign to pre-Christian civilizations.

In other words, the gospel brings its own peculiar vision to liberty, justice, welfare, and humanity. It almost goes without saying that by virtue of this fact alone the gospel systematically confronts us with a choice in politics. Are our attitudes, ideas and opinions grafted into the original evangelical tree? Or do we easily opt for the prevalent middle class interpretation of all these ideas?

When we do, we unintentionally give our consent to the way western man has gradually annexed these ideas for his own middle class life styles. Then we share the widespread common sense view of liberty, humanity and justice, which often bears very little resemblance to the dynamism and scope which the gospel brings to these things. And the political consequences are enormous; for it is a fact that there is no single political decision which is not fed by motives of liberty, humanity, justice, and so on.

In this chapter we will try to show something of the gospel breaking through our middle class opinions and ideas of humanity, welfare, freedom and authority.

Politics and humanity

In the anthology of the World Council entitled *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, professor Lochmann of Czechoslovakia tried to express the difference between humanistic and Christian love of neighbour in his essay, "The Service of the Church in a Socialist Society". He makes the following pointed observation: "Contemporary humanism tries much too hard to draw boundaries:

nation, race, class, or religion. But the Christian is called to be a neighbour to his fellow man even when every natural or ideological sympathy has ceased to exist; when he can no longer see any natural or historical reason for it; when only walls or chasms of traditional enmity can be seen. In the unconditional turning to the neighbour lies the difference between Christian humanity and bourgeois philanthropy (page 246).'

I suppose there's not a single Christian who would deny that the gospel indeed speaks of love of neighbour in these terms. The love which the gospel demands of us cannot and may not be the extension of natural feelings of sympathy or traditional class sentiment - it often breaks right through these feelings. But at the same time we meet ideas and opinions which directly contradict this. All over the world as well as among ourselves, the bourgeois idea of humanity and solidarity indeed seldom extends beyond the walls of class and race. And it also scores political triumphs.

[33] Politics which is driven by the real love of neighbour described in the gospel, cannot and may not discriminate between subjects of my own and foreign races, of my church and other churches, of the class to which one does or does not belong. The love command of the gospel demands that in politics everyone receive equal treatment regardless of his race, class, status or creed - for only, in this way are we children of our heavenly Father who makes His sun to shine down on all (Matt.5). We will even have to ask ourselves if it is correct for us only to extend aid to underdeveloped countries with non-communistic governments, and to not concern ourselves with the massive food shortages in China. Is this a pattern which can exist in the light of the gospel? Why support the fight against tuberculosis in South Vietnam and not in North Vietnam?

Politics which is directed by a middle class view of humanity and solidarity sooner or later causes the state to deteriorate into an instrument for the furtherance of certain classes, certain races, or certain groups in society. Was Marx completely wrong when in the last century he depicted the state as the instrument in the hands of the capitalistic classes?

The love command of the gospel also contains the reply to all those who would surrender politics to the prior approval of powerful interest groups, ignoring the weak in society.

Another example of failing to love our neighbours as ourselves is the deplorable North American practice of perennially neglecting the educational needs of the physically and mentally handicapped when considering priorities for

government spending.

We can't put aside all these remarks with the rejoinder that justice, and not love of neighbour, forms the criteria for politics. Indeed, justice is the basic starting point from which any government has to approach its citizens. But this justice is encircled by, opened up by, and gains depth through the command that we shall love our neighbour as ourselves. And the decision as to whom is our neighbour is not left to our feelings of sympathy or class. For it is precisely the weak, the ones without justice, who need our love. And in politics love means that we exercise justice.

Politics and prosperity

The middle class view of prosperity, which has held the upper hand in politics for years, narrows down to a maximum production and maximum possession of goods and services. It has only gradually been recognized that giving constant priority to this prosperity can mean a great deal of harm to society. In the last century this harm consisted of a rapacious expansion at the expense of the health of the [34] labourers and their families; in this century harm comes to expression in the extreme pollution of our environment (air, water, and soil pollution), in the commercial dominance of cultural expressions and behavioral patterns (consider commercial television and the sub-conscious influence employed by modern advertising techniques), and sometimes in callously laying off employees. When prosperity is mentioned in the Bible it is very far removed from this middle class materialistic view of prosperity. In the Bible prosperity (shalom) means first of all a harmony of peace, well-being and justice for the whole nation. There is no real prosperity when excessive luxury and bitter poverty live in the same nation; or when high production and consumption levels and an enormous - sometimes unnecessary - variety of products go hand in hand with a destroyed nature and a neglected quality of life. There also appears a crack in our facade of riches when it is built at the expense of living conditions in other countries or at the expense of certain groups in our own midst. For then the harmony between material prosperity and justice has been fundamentally disturbed.

We shall take a closer look at this when we discuss aid to developing countries. For the moment it is sufficient to point out that to give in politically to the bourgeois concept of prosperity has until recently led to great harm for our society. Even in the evaluation of individual prosperity, as distinct from social prosperity (roads, recreational facilities, etc.), a strong note of bourgeois and egotistical self-

satisfaction can be detected.

Politics and liberty

We are all familiar with the exclamation: "Liberty, how many crimes have been committed in thy name!" But we often overlook the fact that our own current middle class notions of liberty are dangerous points of departure for political action. The common bourgeois concept of liberty is that one has the freedom to do what one wants. The less I have to be concerned about others, the more freedom I have. But the gospel gives a radically different version. Here freedom means first of all: a task, calling, a norm. "Stand then in Liberty!" Evangelical, biblical liberty means that we stand in relationships which have been restored by Christ. Free in the gospel means that we have been liberated from slavery; not only from the slavery of the letter of the law, but also from the slavery of our own egotistical desires. To this freedom, which spontaneously leads to service for others, the gospel still calls us and everyone else each day.

Seen in this light, the highest goal of a political program which is gripped by the liberty of the gospel can never be that people receive [35] the greatest possible room to manoeuvre to do or not to do what they feel like. Rather, this kind of politics would be intent on letting life unfold along the lines of restored relationships. These are relationships where, for instance, employees and employers can meet each other in the factory as people who both have been addressed in the same way by the one gospel; where rivalry between firms does not degenerate into dishonest and pitiless war; where the producer is no longer instrumental in driving the consumer to selfish and egotistical addiction. Restored relationships are those where exploitation of fellow men disappears. On the international level it means relationships in which one country would no longer need to be a mere extension of the will of other nations or power blocks in order to safeguard its own existence.

In many respects we are far removed from the liberty of these restored relationships. In certain ways - only think of international block formation and the threat to the real liberty of the consumer - they even seem to slip further and further away from us. Revolutions are fermenting in several places in the world; and although they seldom bring real freedom, they are signs that suppression and theft of freedom are on the increase. Our world is on the road to enslavement or liberty; and at the fork in the road the gospel stands as a signpost of real liberty and hope.

It is all the more important therefore that we let go of our concepts of liberty-gone-bourgeois, and again learn to recognize what liberty really is in the gospel

sense. When, for example, a government aligns itself with the liberty of restored relationships in its own country or in the world at large - which sometimes demands a far-reaching interference - then we must have the insight to see that it is very unbiblical to brand this interference as an encroachment on our liberty.

This initially begins on a small scale, on our own national level. When, for example, the government makes an end to the misuse of certain positions of power in the business world - e.g. the power to fix excessively high prices by enacting prohibitive legislation, it is particularly unjust to depict this as a necessary encroachment upon the liberty of business life. For the government in this case does not restrict freedom but the misuse of freedom. The basis of our political economy should be that the meaning of human freedom as well as economic freedom is encapsulated in just service to our neighbour. Hence government offers the best protection possible for economic freedom when it insures that economic activity actually gets around to this neighbourly service.

[36] A politics which attunes itself to the freedom concept of the gospel is also able to escape the danger of onesideness in government. In the past, liberalism and socialism have been especially influenced by a certain onesideness in their political conceptualization. Liberalism saw the liberty of citizens as totally concentrated in their individual civil rights, property rights, contractual rights, etc.; socialism, in reaction to this, viewed liberty as consisting mainly of equal economic status and opportunities.

However, if we approach the liberty of citizens from a Gospel perspective which puts service first, then it becomes clear that both civil rights - as well as economic opportunity belong together, and that they ought never be played off against each other. Government is to have an eye for the civil rights as well as for the economic existence of its citizens to the degree that they need both of these in order to function properly. With respect to both of these things, government, in its unique task, must lay the groundwork so that citizens may have the opportunity to build free lives in service to others. For this reason there also exists the *necessity* for adequate public provisions (roads, recreation, etc.) for adequate social security, welfare, and employment. All these provisions are necessary to make citizens really free, e.g. free for service to their families and their fellow man.

Just as we should be happy with the changing opinion regarding prosperity, so we can be grateful that slowly socialism and liberalism have become noticeably less onesided in their views on human liberty. Although it is equally true that partly because of the shift they have come dangerously close to the bourgeois concept of

liberty which we described above. But let's not fool ourselves: many contemporary Christians are still heavily influenced by these concepts.

Politics and authority

It is here that Christians interested in politics have been strong supporters of 'law and order'. They have pointed at the exalted nature of authority, which necessitated resolute action against all forms of rebellion. The underlying conviction must undoubtedly be appreciated that authority forms an indispensable element in every human society so prone to sin. The Bible clearly shows in several places that the relationships between authority (or leadership) and subordination are not demonic, but have been intended to safeguard human society against chaos and injustice. Christians worthy of the name would be unfaithful to the gospel if they tolerated or welcomed in their ranks anarchistic tendencies which reject governmental authority as such.

However, this does not remove the fact that in these same Christian circles authority has been spoken of and is still spoken of in [37] very un-evangelical fashion - as a completely autonomous entity which is to be honored in all its expressions without objections. Thus any criticism of the various manifestations of authority is already branded beforehand as undermining authority and revolution, no matter whether this concerns government-citizen or employer-employee relationships. Why is this so unbiblical? Those who in this way approach and appreciate authority in fact pay homage to an idea of authority which has been twisted in an individualistic, and therefore humanistic way. Those who speak or think about authority this way place authority in a kind of vacuum in which the will of the individual ruler is decisive. So in fact the exercise of authority becomes an extension of the humanistic goal of man as a law unto himself.

The gospel really speaks in quite a different way about authority and lines of authority. It doesn't only posit norms for subordinates (for example: the norm of obedience), it norms both subordinates and those in authority. All those who exercise authority in any way are subject to the norms which God has posited for authority in every sphere of life. And these are norms which always find their character and content in service to God and neighbour.

Hence it is extremely dangerous to dismiss beforehand any criticism of the manner in which existing authority is exercised. The authorities themselves can sometimes be directly responsible for a crisis in their authority!

The term 'anti-revolutionary', as Groen Van Prinsterer said many times, may

not be narrowed down to protection of governmental authority against anarchistic threats. For the term includes an openness to any criticism which has as its aim a more responsible functioning of authority as true service; and it also includes an active working for the realization of *that* kind of authority.

When for example, active resistance grows against the governments of certain South American countries which allow social injustices to exist and afford protection only to the strong, then this resistance may very well be an expression of the upholding-in-deed of governmental authority, even if it manifests itself in the sharpest possible criticism of those in power. In circumstances such as these the words of Groen become fully actual again, even for 'anti-revolutionaries': "I must even be jealous of the title revolutionary, as soon as revolution means a just reformation according to the demands of the time and circumstances" (1847). One who blocks the reformation of authority under these circumstances must be called - using Groen's own words - a contra-revolutionary, not an anti-revolutionary because he doesn't choose the side of a just but of an unjust exercise of authority [38]

The idea of the state

After our attempt to place current political concepts such as freedom, love of neighbour, prosperity and authority, in an articulated biblical framework, it might be well again to demonstrate the decisive significance of the content of political ideas (in a completely different fashion) by briefly considering concepts and ideas on the nature of the state.

In Protestant Christian circles it has been the followers of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea (especially Dooyeweerd and Mekkes) who have worked intensively to develop a Christian idea of the state. And as a result of their penetrating analysis it appears that there is always a parallel idea of the state hidden behind the way in which political content is given to concepts such as freedom, prosperity and authority.

For example, the orthodox liberal conception was that of the formal constitutional state. The purpose of the state was to unceasingly uphold existing individual civil rights. (Compare the typical liberal themes in Ch. III). Within that formal constitutional (legal) framework, according to liberal opinion, the highest attainable well-being for total society would come to pass automatically. This was viewed as the 'ordre naturel', the natural order of things. On the other hand the typical socialistic ideal of the state is that of the socio-economic welfare state. In

socialist thought the special purpose of the state is to take care of the total community from cradle to grave.

It appears from these two descriptions that ideas concerning the state held by various political directions are indeed pure extensions of their own concepts concerning freedom and justice. The same accents appear. Thus the formal constitutional state is the state which must realize freedom in the liberal sense; the socialist caretaker state is the state which must bring liberty closer to reality in the socialistic sense.

The biblical idea of state, in distinction from both these other ideas, has sometimes been characterized as the idea of the justice-in-fact state. One could put it this way: according to the biblical concept, government should be measured in all its decisions by the yardstick of strict justice with respect to all its citizens; a justice which, may not be eroded to the point of mere protection of existing civil rights, but which is serviceable to the true 'liberty' of the citizens in all societal sectors. Hence the term 'justice-in-fact' is employed, not 'formal-legal justice'.

Sphere sovereignty

To indicate that the relationship between government and all the other spheres of society (business, family, associations, etc.) must be [39] one of unique service, the term 'sphere sovereignty (or responsibility)' is employed. This term goes back to the pure biblical notion that no sphere of society is more 'holy' than any other, and that therefore no single sphere (such as the state) may arrogantly seek to take over the callings or functions of other spheres. On the contrary, the state must in its own way be servicable to a normed realization and fulfillment in other societal sectors. However, it is also easy to fill up this term with self-chosen content and thereby hopelessly twist the original meaning. Instead of a continued understanding of the concept 'sphere sovereignty' as the respect which government should have for the *fulfillment of calling* in other spheres, it has been quite often made into something quite different: that government had to respect all kinds of acts in the other spheres. Because of this the concept came suspiciously close to the typical liberal way of accentuating the complete protection by government of all individual civil rights.

When we understand the idea of 'sphere sovereignty (or responsibility)' as it was originally meant to be understood, however, it doesn't at all contradict what we concluded was the evangelical notion of freedom. On the contrary, these two concepts - freedom and sphere sovereignty - fit beautifully together. For government has to serve the freedom of the people by freeing its citizens to *answer to the calling*

which they have received in their own sphere of life. Hence it is a misconstruing of the idea of sphere sovereignty if, for example, one already condemns beforehand governmental wage and price guidelines as interference in the sovereign sphere of business enterprise. Such wage and price guidelines may be exactly what is needed to maintain the unique character of free enterprise, to enable business to truly serve the entire nation; for this is a norm which is given for every business concern. A government which promotes the actual honouring of this norm by business for *that very reason* honours the sphere responsibility of companies.

No new derived principles

It is not unthinkable that after reading this chapter some readers will ask themselves if we have not again constructed a number of 'derived' principles. Is it really necessary, thus one could argue, to arrive at practical political decisions only via all kinds of 'treatises' about freedom, love of neighbour, and a host of other things? Isn't that a detour, a falling back into an antiquated thought pattern? Don't the ideas and concepts given biblical content serve as a new kind of 'derived' principle?

These questions spring from a misunderstanding which we would be glad to try and remove. That we pause at great length in this [40] chapter in considering the contest which can be given to concepts such as 'liberty' and 'neighbourly love', does not mean at all that only through these kinds of discourses a truly Christian politics can be born. Then indeed these essays and concept analyses would be nothing other than a new kind of 'derived' principles. The intention of this chapter was a totally different one - to make it clear that every politician, whether he is a Christian or not, even in the most complicated political decisions acts out of certain motives, certain views, out of a certain notion of what norms his decisions. We Christians, *before* we even know it, adhere to motives-and-views-gone-middle-class, and take our point of departure in a bourgeois notion of what is. Therefore in the midst of the most practical political question we must always be critical of our own motives, and must personally attune them to the norms of the gospel (not theologically, but out of a living faith).

So, there has been no attempt here to construct a new detour between gospel and political practice. On the contrary, exactly because the gospel as active power directly drives us to commit certain political acts and refrain from committing others, it must be all-important for us not to confuse this 'driving' with our own middle class motives

VII. THE CHOICE BETWEEN PEACE AND DEMONIC POWER

[41] This method of giving content to political ideas is not the only political area in which the gospel confronts us with a choice. The Good News also confronts us, together with all other men, with the choice between peace and demonic power.

Every political movement in one way or another searches for the fountain of true societal happiness. But this searching makes no sense unless it is accompanied by insight into the source of evil, of sin, of the ever-recurring misery and abuse in this present world. Politics should seek to end these things as much as possible, but it cannot do so unless it has a clear insight into the real causes of misery and abuse.

A Christian should not be a fatalist. He ought to know that much evil and misery in the world can be rooted out and can be opposed by the just use of governmental authority and by a re-formation of society. (For example, it is known that the germ for chaos and revolution can often be found in an amassing of power and riches.) But on the other hand the Christian also knows very well that a perfectly happy society cannot be built by us, because in the final analysis evil hides within man himself. Hence his deepest hopes are fixed on the city not built with hands, and his battle against injustice in this world is also meant as a proclamation of this future society, coming from God, in which justice will live in deed.

It is understandable, however, that in the eyes of many these will only be beautiful words. The idealists among them will continue to search for other ways to establish complete and final happiness in this world once and for all in spite of or because of the ever-recurring world wars and social injustices.

But how can it be found? And why is it that such happiness is too elusive? It is clear that in order to answer all these questions a scapegoat could be most useful. Some movements seek to lay the blame at the door of technology and culture, which have reduced and enslaved humanity. Others blame it on the lack of time for reflection and meditation. Idealistic political movements often seek to identify the scapegoat as a specific group or class or race. Then the only way to real happiness and the regaining of paradise lost naturally is the 'erasure' of that group, clan or race in question. The 'sacrifice' is great, and it costs much blood, but it's justified by the 'goal'.

[42] Examples of this are known to us all, either from history or through experience. The French revolution found its scapegoat, and not without provocation, in the nobility and clergy; hence the guillotine. Communism saw and still sees, again

not without cause, the capitalistic class as the scapegoat; hence the bloody revolution of 1917. Nazism saw the Jewish race as the scapegoat; hence the concentration camps as means for the "End-lösung der Judenfrage" (the final solution to the Jewish problem).

Is common sense adequate protection against a repetition of this kind of thing? No. In the final analysis there are forms of demonic power involved here that can attach themselves to every human spirit, even to the spirit of Christians who are not on their guard. Susceptivity to the demonic powers of 'erasure' is very great for all those who are inclined to seek the cause of misery not within themselves, but in others. The gospel is the only effective weapon against this inclination in the human heart. In his days, Groen Van Prinsterer wrote in similar vein against supporters of the French Revolution. The all-powerful motif for him was, "The Gospel against revolution!"

This same thought comes to the fore in, for example, the various works of the Russian novelist Dostoyevsky. In one of his books, *Crime and Punishment*, the hero Raskolnikov is possessed by exactly this demonic power: "But if for the sake of his idea such a man has to step over corpses or wade through blood, he is, in my opinion, absolutely entitled in accordance with the dictates of his conscience, to permit himself to wade through blood, all depending of course on the nature and scale of his idea" (Part III, Section 5, p. 277, Penguin Edition, 1963).

There is indeed a real choice to be made here. A choice with enormous political consequences. Those who say yes to the gospel of Jesus Christ have discovered the strongest defense against demonic power and politics in human life itself. Those who say no to the gospel are playing with fire. And once again it is the gospel which places us at the crossroads.

The role of demonic power in war

The significance of all this for the problem of armament and the waging of war cannot easily be overestimated. When we compare the wars and armament goals of this century with those of the previous one, it is undeniable that the 'ideological' character of war has become more pronounced. In our time wars and tensions are characterized not so much by struggle over territories and territorial expansion as by a struggle which is "hallowed" by one ideology or another. Today [43] 'escalation', the step by step deterioration of a specific political conflict, is often used in warfare. But the most serious manner of escalation is the ideologizing of a conflict, the spiritualizing of an existing conflict into a battle for the holy Pan-Arabicity; into a battle for the coming of the racially pure Nazi Reich; and into a battle

against 'capitalism' or against 'communism'. When these ideologized goals are at stake, the hesitation to reach for arms and increasingly more powerful weapons disappears like snow in spring. Then a conflict becomes a charged struggle between spirits that can only be adequately decided through the death of the opponent.

Vietnam

By way of example, one could point to the conflict in Vietnam. This conflict has in fact reached such bitter proportions because on both sides an ideologization has taken place. In as far as the Viet Cong have been influenced by Communism this was a communistic ideologizing of the conflict; it is pictured as the battle against the capitalists, the arch-enemies of human happiness. But from the American side we also can detect a gradual spiritual escalation. Although at first the struggle in Vietnam was still represented as a struggle against Communist-led aggression, which had to be checked as aggression, slowly the view that this was a battle against communism as such has pushed to the foreground: a battle therefore in which all sorts of weapons could be used, including napalm.

This is a form of ideologizing because communism as a spiritual movement can of course never be combatted with military force. It is a misconception and therefore a form of demonization of a conflict when the assumption is made that a spiritual battle can be decided by military might.

Of course we do not wish to intimate that every military reaction to armed aggression by others is to be condemned as such. There are situations in which it would be unchristian and gross injustice to let a destructive flood intent on murder descend upon innocent people with impunity. We remain, as Bonhoeffer and others put it, fully responsible to see to it that others don't seize weapons to destroy lives without being opposed. But we would do well not to forget that any military reply can only be judged according to the yardstick of whether or not the attempted attack on the lives of others is justified. When a military reaction is 'justified' as taking an active part in the battle of the spirits, then one succumbs, in our opinion, to demonic powers. Here it appears again that the gospel confronts the Christian as well as the non-Christian in politics.

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Ideology and pragmatism

The words 'ideology' and 'ideologizing' have already been used. It is essential to say something further about these terms, because they are often totally misunderstood and misused. 'Ideology' is a word which stems from the time of the

Enlightenment (the end of the eighteenth century). It then meant a basic conviction or spiritual insight which has been made to serve a practical striving after power. The word 'ideology' became especially popular when Lenin started to use it to characterize the world views which exist under capitalism. For example, he saw, in the line of Marx, the Christian faith as a typical capitalistic ideology, a weapon in the hands of capitalists to reconcile the suppressed labouring class with the continued existence of capitalistic society. Thus ideology is a religion or a view of life utilized for the practical goals of power. Communism does not mind describing itself as an ideology. Communism is its own weapon in the struggle for the victory of the labouring class. Communism from the time of Lenin has always been strongly oriented to that practical goal. Everything which serves the interests of the actual class struggle should be mobilized, including spiritual insights and convictions. Therefore one could also characterize Communism as a mature pragmatism: it stakes everything on a practical striving after a new society; even the arts, science and ethics must be servicable to this cause. A scientist, for example, does not serve some kind of objective 'truth', but must before everything else be prejudiced in favor of the class struggle. And as a consolation the communist ideology points out to the scientist that by following in the track of prejudice he will be shown later to have been 'right' when the final and complete 'truth' comes about in a communistic society.

We see then that ideology is a dangerous word. Therefore it's just as dangerous when in the confrontation between East and West one takes one's point of departure in the fact that the gospel and communism are related to each other as two ideologies. Then one admits to the Communists, as it were, that the gospel is intended to promote the continuance of western capitalism.

Furthermore, it is plain that there exist clear connections between a fully developed pragmatism and the utilization, for practical purposes, of basic convictions as ideologies. Pragmatism is an especially suitable soil for a lowering of a world view to an ideology.

This last remark is of course not without significance in the contemporary problem of armaments and war. Now that a mature pragmatism is taking hold of people more and more, the danger also increases that spiritual convictions become used and exploited to justify a military struggle; that is, without pausing to ask whether the [45] struggle in itself should be viewed as just. Hence pragmatism could easily lead to an ideologization of a military conflict.

Along with this it is well to point out that the American way of life is

already strongly pragmatic. The semi-official aid of the American government given to an organization such as Moral Rearmament is an example of how one can indeed try to use the Christian faith for practical goals, such as the struggle against communistic power and the preservation of a free western society. But before we know it, we succumb to these forms of ideologizing ourselves; the crusade mentality is still alive among many Christians.

We shall have to become completely permeated by the fact that the gospel, for example, tests both communistic *and* western societies, and that we as Christians never could or should sell our souls for the preservation of any human society. And there really exists the danger of making an idol out of the so-called free West. Karl Barth has empathically pointed this out in his "Letter to a Pastor in the German Democratic Republic", 1959. He who does not see the danger, or denies its existence, has probably already fallen prey to the ideologizing of his Christian faith without knowing it.

The role of demonic power in a prosperous society

The danger of a demonizing of life is not just limited to the area of war and armaments, even though it finds its most pregnant expression there. In the form of all kinds of addiction it can also be present in an outwardly peaceful society. And we mean addiction not only to drugs and stimulants, but also addiction to one's own possessions, often called 'materialism'. This addiction does not have to halt at the conviction of individuals, but can also take hold of an entire society. This happens concretely when, for example, the goal of satisfactory economic growth in a nation is exalted to a dogma, to which all other policies either have to contribute or be sacrificed. This danger lurks more and more in the West now that communism has started to increasingly emphasize that the struggle with capitalism will be decided in the economic sphere. Communism wants to prove before attentive audiences in developing countries that its economic system is superior to that of the West because it is capable of bringing about a larger annual economic growth. Through this the West is indeed led into the demonic temptation of viewing this as the only and decisive yardstick of its societal system.

Over against this we most certainly have to point out that the stimulation of economic growth may not be viewed as the only criteria of a specific societal structure. And for a prosperous society this is doubly true. Economic growth is necessary in so far as it can provide [46] conditions for freedom and social justice, and not the other way around. It would be folly crowned as wisdom if an already prosperous society, for the sake of a little bit more prosperity, would endanger real

freedom and real justice.

Apart from this we have to view the poverty which reigns in other parts of the world as a mortgage on the prosperity which we have reached. We will have to accept without rancor a lessening of our own level of prosperity when that is necessary to help start a process of economic growth in other parts of the world. Facts and developments point out more and more clearly that the necessity for this lessening of our growth indeed exists.

VIII. THE CHOICE BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT OUGHT TO BE

[47] The gospel confronts us with the choice between what is and what ought to be. In the history of the Christian Church it has become evident again and again that there are great dangers for Christians on precisely this point. The early Church 'was so convinced that the Christian has no abiding city in this world that it sought to escape as far as possible into otherworldliness. In the reaction which followed, however, people turned to the world with such enthusiasm that they made the salvation of existing structures and situations one of the goals of their own participation in society.

The view of society which existed in the middle ages canonized, for example, existing societal relationships by arranging them in the form of a pyramid, according to the Pauline example of the one body of Christ with many members which need each other (I Cor. 12). In this structure everyone had to remain in the class or rank in which he was called (with an appeal to I Cor. 7). Thus the history of the Christian Church resembles the steady swinging of a pendulum between shunning and accepting the world between negation and affirmation.

But the Reformers, however imperfectly, pointed out that these were not the only two possibilities. A Lutheran saying, popular in Norway, gives voice to a third possibility: One can at one and the same time be a full citizen of the earthly kingdom and the Kingdom of God. Those who want to live by the gospel will for exactly this reason turn also to this world and its citizens. The idea has sometimes been expressed like this: a man is converted twice—first from man to Christian, and then from Christian to man. The gospel points us to God, and because of that, back to the

world again. But at the same time this evangelical orientation to the world could never be an orientation which is at peace with everything that exists in the world. For citizenship in the Kingdom of God will express itself in our desire to foreshadow that coming Kingdom in this world, and search for the justice of that Kingdom in earthly relationships. Not what is, but what ought to be, must be the yardstick of our actions.

The choice that confronts everyone is found in the gospel, and not in our own inventions. The gospel is a power unto salvation not only [48] for individuals, but for communities and for nations as well. It doesn't safeguard communities as they exist now, but looks forward to 'salvation' in the future when Jesus Christ returns again. To save human society for the future will require us to work for basic changes now. Not just any change will do (then we'd exchange conservatism for progressivism), but changes which make society just indeed.

Architectonic criticism

In this connection, Abraham Kuyper, the leader of the nineteenth century Dutch reformation, once coined the term 'architectonic criticism' - a critique of the architecture, the very structure of our society. This societal structure demands revision, especially at all those points where the structure itself gives rise to sin, evil and injustice. For the sake of the gospel we should never be at peace with these elements of human societal structure.

The clearest example of this is the critique Kuyper himself gave of the society of his days. At that time there reigned an unchecked competition between businesses, a competition which was so severe that it extended to the wages and contracts of employees. One factory would try to take advantage of another by lowering wages and involving the wives and children of its labourers in the production process.

Kuyper clearly saw that this 'social question' couldn't be reduced simply to the immoral conduct of the individual entrepreneurs. Anyone who didn't engage in these practices could expect nothing less than bankruptcy; he was simply pushed off the market by his competitors. Hence Kuyper came to the conclusion that the very structure of society itself gave rise to this evil and injustice. Societal architecture forced businessmen to commit injustice towards their labourers.

Kuyper's solution to this problem was far ahead of his time. He asserted that the social aspect of economic life was fundamentally broken, and that therefore only the bringing together of employers and employees could create a climate within which the evils could be rooted out. So he proposed a nation-wide programme of

voluntary, systematic collaboration between employees and employers in different industries; an idea which he changed into a proposal to enforce such a systemic collaboration by public law when in 1910 there was still no evidence of a willingness to meet together by employers and employees. Kuyper's insight into the necessity of bringing management and labour together gradually came about in the Netherlands, and finally made it possible for both sides to agree on nation-wide [49] collective labour contracts for separate industries. These contracts, arrived at through consultation of national management and labour leaders, made wages a factor placed beyond the competition of the market place. Labour conditions were then agreed upon beforehand, independent of the competition between various firms in each of the industries. The structure of society had been changed; it no longer gave rise to this particular form of unbearable injustice. This societal restructuring was completed when subsequently these collective labour contracts were made law by the government.

This whole story is important because it illustrates clearly that the very structure of society itself can give rise to injustices. To put it differently, a Christian approach to politics can't restrict itself to the limited area of individual ethics; it will have to embody a large part of social ethics. It isn't enough for a Christian approach to politics to call individuals and groups to charity; the government will have to intervene in the societal structure so that it becomes a framework creating more just circumstances to prevail.

Developmental aid

Another example of evil and injustice is the continually widening gap in prosperity between rich and poor countries. In this area of widespread concern we shouldn't put all our eggs in the one basket of insufficient private charity, but we've got to be aware of the structural roots of the problem.

The great gap between rich and poor countries is in fact a legacy of the colonial past of western countries. Even if they didn't directly exploit their colonies, without exception they all failed to enable the peoples of these countries to start their own economic growth; all these countries could not break through the desperate cycle of developmental aid is no generous gestures on the part of the West but the payment of a moral debt.

When we try to uncover the structural roots of this worldwide 'social question' a little further, we discover that one of the basic reasons for the widening gap appears to be that the West has the tendency to translate each growth in

prosperity into an equivalent growth in consumption, which in turn leads to new investments which are oriented to ever more luxurious consumption. In other words, the West in its prosperity structure is oriented solely towards itself. Because of this a structural disharmony has been precipitated on a global scale. Here in the West the societal order is oriented to the stimulation (for example, through advertising) of ever newer and more luxurious needs to consume. These needs in turn guarantee a sufficient [50] market for various multi-national corporations, while elsewhere in the world the stage where the most elementary needs can be met has yet to be reached.

Thus the global economic picture exhibits two completely separate chains of events. While in the poor countries this chain consists of 'poverty - some prosperity - population growth - poverty', the chain in the West goes: 'prosperity - the stimulation of new wants - greater consumption - higher production - new prosperity'. In startling contrast to the stimulated new wants in our countries stand the blatantly unsatisfied needs of the rest of the world. It is clear that these two chains find their root in a western societal structure that will have to be given a different orientation - no longer an exclusively inward preoccupation aimed solely at increasing existing internal prosperity, but an outward orientation aimed at decreasing the poverty of others. You could compare it to what Churchill did in England during the war years. In the same way that he reshaped England's peacetime economy into a war machine so we should reshape our economy into a developmentally harnessed economy.

How this goal can be reached is not easy to determine, and more study is required. The following possibilities might serve as suggestions for the time being:

- + Intervention in the want-stimulating process in the western world; reflection on the advertising phenomenon.
- + Promotion of a world economic system in which there is a just distribution of labour, capital and industrial activity in every country; abolition of all trade barriers for the products of underdeveloped countries in our western markets.
- + Introduction of a conscious choice between our prosperity and the poverty of others in all phases of our income, planning and disbursement processes, as well as in all phases of policy formation.
- + Greater tax exemptions for gifts to developing countries; special taxes earmarked for developmental aid.

In contrast to these proposals, compare the U.S. Congress' decision to cut off all

foreign aid, perhaps because of a diplomatic defeat in the U.N. over the seating of mainland China. Such an act of blatant disregard for weaker nations is hardly acceptable for those who realize the responsibilities that western countries bear for the gross underdevelopment of many South American, African and Asian countries. [51]

The Corporation in our society

In corporate life the distinction between what is and what ought to be confronts us in a twofold way. First, is the corporation structured with justice for all of its members? And second, can an enterprise deal justly with others - the consumer and other businesses? Keeping in mind what we said earlier, the central problem in both of these questions appears to be whether the present modern corporate structure directly causes injustice, forming a roadblock in the path of the harmonious development of the corporation according to its own distinctive norms.

So it isn't our purpose to find out how we can subject business enterprise to the 'sovereign' will of the state or community. The real question is how government can provide a framework through its legislation so that the business enterprise will be able to grow and unfold in real, normative freedom - a development that isn't lopsided because of injustice.

The Internal Yardstick-the corporation as community

From widely varying viewpoints much has been written about what a business concern ought to be. However, in a Christian social movement there is one recurrent, overarching theme: that the enterprise ought to be a community, or at any rate ought to show some of the characteristics of a community. On this point the Christian social movement in the Netherlands from its very start distinguished itself from the typical socialistic train of thought. The socialists believe that the enterprise can never be a true community because within it there is a fundamental clash between the interests of capital and labour, the exploiter and the exploited. For example, the report of the Wiardi Beckman Foundation, *The Reshaping of the Corporation* (1959), declares that the enterprise does not have, nor ought to have, the character of "Gemeinschaft", but of "Gesellschaft". A business is nothing more than a forced cooperation between individuals who because of their own interests depend on cooperation, but who have nothing more in common.

Hence the restructuring of boards of directors in limited companies has been suggested. The directors appointed by labour and the directors appointed by stockholders will have no other duties except respectively defining the interests of

labourers and stockholders in the company. The directors aren't responsible for the development of a company as a whole unit.

Why did the Dutch Christian social movement from its very beginning emphasize the communal character of a business enterprise? Because all those who are involved in the enterprise – employers, [52] employees, and stockholders - are more than merely representatives of certain sometimes sharply opposed, interests. They are before all else living people who as people are subject to the commandment that they love one another as themselves; and that includes the sphere of industry as well as the rest of life. As people they've all been placed in one societal sphere, and within that sphere the great love commandment must be made effective in one way or another. The gospel doesn't come to a halt at the gates of the corporation; it places its evangelical demand for love of neighbour within the various enterprises no matter to which 'group' or 'class' that neighbour may belong.

The purpose of business

That public opinion has largely lost sight of the communal character of a corporation is probably due to contemporary views of the purpose of an enterprise. The purpose of a business is often seen as consisting of and being limited to a striving toward the greatest possible efficiency in the production of goods and services.

Those who hold this view have little argument with the dominant role played by the conflict between labour and capital in business because if business only has an economic goal, then economic interests and conflicts of economic interest must be emphasized. But then the business enterprise is denatured. For the meaning of business isn't exhausted in a striving after the most efficient economic production. As one of the papal encyclicals has rightly pointed out - in industry people as well as products are being formed. In business much of the life of all those who labour is determined, and the foundations for happy or unhappy lives are lain; here a person's vocation is either frustrated or fulfilled. There is more involved in business than the production of goods; a responsibility to give meaning to many human lives is at stake. And at the same time the contribution of business to human society resides in broader economic goals.

Ownership in industry

Our position isn't just a string of moralizing statements everyone can subscribe to; when this position is taken there are real political consequences.

Usually people reduce a company to the place where they work. The only thing that matters there is a businesslike efficiency. Only industrial class interests meet. Because of these attitudes and practices, great misconceptions have crept into the question of 'ownership' in industry.

For years the thesis has been defended that those who provide the capital are in fact the legal owners of a business enterprise. This thesis is (apart from the process of growing independence of the corporation [53] from the direct control of the stockholders) indeed completely acceptable to all those who view a factory as a place of work containing machines operated by the labour force. But when one rightly understands an enterprise to be a social unit in which there is daily cooperation between co-related, living people then it is utterly impossible to see those who furnish the capital as the owners of the enterprise. For that would boil down to a sort of slavery, to a situation in which live people themselves are objects of ownership during certain hours of the day. Those who furnish the capital are not the owners of any enterprise; they are, at most, the owners of the means of production, of the capital invested in the enterprise. The evangelical distinction between what is and what ought to be inescapably confronts us here.

Clearly this point of departure carries with it important political consequences. For if those who provide the capital cannot be the owners of the enterprise, that dynamically interrelated societal cooperation, then they also cannot lay claim to a full account of what the enterprise has done with their capital investment. Those who view a business not as a societal structure composed of living people, but as purely an extension of the interests of those who provide capital, do injustice to the real concerns of that business and have in fact adopted a piece of pure capitalism. For the word 'capitalism' means that 'capital' has been accorded a dominant place in human society.

To put it differently, the enterprise, as a living work community of entrepreneurs and employees, has a right, if necessary, to maintain its own integral societal development notwithstanding the pressure exerted by those who furnish the capital.

Gerbrandy, the great Dutch pioneer of the Christian social movement in the years before World War II, once correctly expressed this as follows:

The existence of the labour community has consequences just as much as the existence of the national community. From an existing labour community flow worker demands which you might ignore for many years, but which you can never destroy, because they form an essential ingredient of that

labour community. It is understandable that an entrepreneur says: this factory is mine. But the workers, through whose labour alone this bit of capital becomes productive, could and should say, even if the expression then has a different meaning, this factory belongs to us. The very sad thing in our situation is this: people sense the danger that the function of the entrepreneur might be attacked in its very marrow, but what they do not see is that a business can be attacked as well in its very marrow by the [54] violation of the function of labour. Many do not see that this has already happened, and that nature is busy reclaiming her rights. (*The Battle for New Social Structures*, p.164)

The External Yardstick free enterprise

The problem of industrial structuration can also be put in more general terms against the background of the service which business has to perform for society as a whole. Here the thesis could be defended that precisely because the interests of capital often play such a dominant-role in present-day industry, a business cannot sufficiently fulfill its own independent service to society. In other words, the present structure of business is open to a structural critique.

This thesis needs further clarification; this can be done most easily by first observing some random examples of high-handed action by industry.

High-handed action towards consumers: the tendency of producers to artificially reduce the life expectancy of their product (planned obsolescence) to ensure greater sales in the future; the tendency towards commercial control of cultural expressions (for example, commercial television) and commercial behaviour patterns (via new advertising techniques).

High-handed action towards the environment: not taking sufficient precautions against air, sound, water and soil pollution; fire hazards, etc.

High-handed action towards employees: the sometimes premature and unnecessary firing of employees during financial difficulties.

Of course these examples aren't given to single out particular businesses.

Contemporary entrepreneurs aren't usually bent on exploitation; where the enumerated evils still exist, particular businessmen are often concerned about them. But this individual concern indicates that attacking these evils is not just a question of raising personal standards of conduct. The fault lies deeper; it's hidden in the very structure of today's enterprises. These often faulty structures force just

about every entrepreneur, no matter how well intentioned he may be personally, to participate in existing patterns of evil in certain respects.

The central problem once formulated by Goyder, the English Christian entrepreneur, is this: "Does existing corporate legislation and existing business law sufficiently create the conditions business leaders need to balance the interests of stockholders, employers, [55] consumers and members of the local and the national community while still pursuing their economic task?"

Of course the answer is no. Present business legislation so heavily accents the relationship of corporate investors that corporations have great difficulty getting around to dealing justly with the interests of their employees and consumers, for example. The scales on which business leadership has to measure all these interests aren't fair, and aren't accurate. A sufficient return on capital investment in a business can sometimes weigh so mercilessly heavy that often employees are fired too quickly, and the interests of consumers are neglected out of hand (if it means higher profits), and there is little responsible precaution against pollution of air, water and soil. In other words, business isn't free enough to adequately provide voluntary service to the rest of us fellow human beings - its neighbours.

Perhaps a quotation from a report in 1965 by the (Dutch Telders Foundation is more convincing than a long argument. "In many companies, especially the large diversified ones, continuity of employment opportunity can go hand in hand with the greatest possible earning power. But when the demands of earning capacity and employment opportunity clash at some point, in the interest of the whole society earnings should be decisive." (pg. 96) In other words, the value of continuing employment is considered of no importance when compared with the demand that invested capital show a maximum return! This is a patent example of how absolutistically profit considerations still control the way many people think and act. The corporation ought to be able to act out of a broad view of (social) profitability that includes respect for the just interest of others (employees, consumers, etc.).

That some great public corporations have seen something of this vision, and have expressly formulated this in their charters (that not profit but continuity of employment comes first), is already an important step in the right direction. But these examples are limited to some form of guaranteed annual wage, and usually don't go much beyond insuring the interests of the employees a little better.

Therefore government should contribute to a structural change in industry through its corporate legislation. Here are some concrete avenues which are open:

Introduction of legislation enabling employees or their representatives to

participate in corporate policy decisions where vital employee interests are at stake.

Following Goyder's idea - the granting of a special title (Goyder mentions the term: Public Company) to those enterprises which [56] have shown that they are capable of and willing to act responsibly toward employees, consumers, and society at large.

Laying down general rules for the composition of corporate boards and industrial directorates so industry can be profitable in the broad sense mentioned above.

In conclusion, neither the false spirit of corporate liberalism nor the equally misguided schemes of the latest socialism can answer to the gospel of Christ which calls the structuration of economic life into obedience. The Word of God detects, liberates and directs. What is isn't what ought to be.

IX. THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL OPINION

In previous chapters we've attempted to show something of the gospel challenge in political life. The gospel continually tests those who bear political responsibilities; and under a democratic system of government we all shoulder this responsibility in a sense. The gospel points the way in political life by confronting us with true freedom and justice (Ch. VI); by indicating the only satisfying way in which man in society can be saved from demonic powers (Ch. VII); by remaking and reforming that which is into that which ought to be, freeing the structures of society from the power of injustice through the searchlights of redemption (Ch. VIII). This recognition of the gospel's own testing power is of unbelievable importance for Christian politics. But to this point we have only had the totally indispensable background out of which our political action has to develop, and to which it constantly will have to come as a proclamation. But how does actual political work develop? And how does the background we've discussed come into play? It should be obvious that answers to these questions can only really be given in political practice itself. But some general guidelines can be given which may be useful in practice.

Needs and their representatives

In day-to-day politics a sound political judgment almost always evolves in a process of searching out, testing, and harmonizing needs. So we'll pause for a

moment to look at this process by giving an example. A question common in North America is whether or not government should intervene where the rapid expansion of cities results in land speculation and geographical problems.

The searching out of needs

Gathering as complete a picture as possible of the needs which are to be satisfied is the first phase of political opinion formation. Roughly speaking, needs fall into two categories. The first category consists of special needs of societal groups (farmers, pensioners, middle class, etc.) and societal structures (families, businesses, clubs, organizations). The second category might be designated as general or common needs. Examples of general needs would be sufficient employment opportunities, public order and morality, public mental [58] health, stable currency, social stability, peaceful co-existence between nations, and sound U.S.-Canadian relations.

To obtain an adequate panorama of all the needs bearing on a specific political problem, we must have a thorough knowledge of the nature of the political problem. Such a fact-finding tour often takes considerable time and energy. As far as the urban problem is concerned, for example, we can specify among others, the following needs:

a. Special needs:

Needs of a city population for adequate recreational facilities, adequate transportation, pure air, room for housing development.

Needs of the surrounding rural population for adequate room to operate, conditions favorable to production (roads, orientation to markets).

Needs of business enterprises for possibilities for expansion and new branches, a good infra-structure.

b. General Needs:

public health (in connection with air and water pollution)

spiritual health (recreation, city planning, objections to urban anonymity and alienation)

good water and soil conservation

keeping taxes at an acceptable level

The evaluation of needs

The second phase of political opinion formation is much more difficult than the first. The weighing and ranking of the various discovered needs are at stake

here. This is an inescapable task when needs threaten to clash in one way or another. The real political problem is hidden in this clashing of needs.

With respect to the needs enumerated above, this threatening clash appears to exist on several points:

The needs of the city dwellers for more recreation and more room for building expansion seem to clash with both rural needs for adequate room to operate (farms of sufficient size), and industrial needs to expand and settle new areas. Some industrial settlements conflict with needs for optimum public health because they create air and water pollution. Some industries even 'get in each other's way' because of a limited amount of available industrial sites, especially along major traffic arteries. [59]

Increased social legislation, desired by most groups, finds itself confronted by the general need for a reasonable tax level on the needs of tax-paying families and businesses. In the very nature of the case, these needs come to the fore in every governmental measure which costs money.

All these needs have to be evaluated; their relative importance in relation to each other has to be determined. Is the need for more roads greater than the need of taxpayers for lower taxes? Are the needs of a metropolis weightier than those of farming communities?

It is exactly at this difficult point of evaluation in the political process of opinion formation that the context of previous chapters becomes fully relevant. For in the evaluation of interests, no one can leave his convictions at home and every political direction brings its own opinion to bear.

Consider for yourselves:

1. The interpretation one gives to concepts like freedom and justice causes a weighted interpretation of specific needs (Ch. VI).
2. The needs of segments of the population which are considered 'road-blocks' on the way to a better society will be held to be of no value or will even be weighed negatively (Ch. VII).
3. 'Vested' interests will receive extra emphasis from those who tenaciously hold on to what 'is'; and they will be regarded lightly by those who have unbridled passion for change (Ch. VIII).

Example 1: the 'freedom' to settle in any city will be considered more important by conservatives than by socialists, since for the conservative an individual right is at stake! The conservative will also defend the interests of the taxpayer, for paying taxes limits the rights

of private property.

Example 2: the interests of property owners will be completely or almost completely ignored by those political streams which put a high priority on the need for a continual expansion of commercial interests in a city.

Evangelical politics will certainly have to apply its own typical yardstick to this evaluation phase:

It will have to see these needs in the light of evangelical concepts of justice-against the backdrop of the peculiar calling and service which subjects have to fulfill in their own sphere of society (families, industry, etc.). Freedom to establish a business in any location, for example, will have to be evaluated according to the meaning that this freedom has for a proper fulfillment of service and task on the part of business with respect to members [60] of the enterprise and society as a whole. When the level of taxes is to be determined, evangelical politicians will have to ask themselves what effect a higher tax would have on the functioning of families and businesses according to their specific natures. An evangelical politics shouldn't judge needs in the light of existing societal power structures, or knuckle under to pressures brought to bear by one political interest or another, but it should give special attention to the needs of the weak and the powerless. It shouldn't be satisfied with an evaluation of needs as they manifest themselves in an existing situation, but should above all evaluate these interests against the background of the desired direction of society, taking into account the structural critique which is necessary at certain points in our society together with the needs for a harmoniously functioning society in the future.

This last point, for example, demands that in the problematics of urbanization a judgment be formed concerning the land use situation which could come into being in the long run (in 1980 or 2000). Against this background several needs are placed in perspective. Agricultural production for example, will only be able to maintain itself if it modernizes in larger units of production, which are, moreover, attuned and specialized to the needs of an adjacent population center. In the light of this, future traffic problems receive a greater urgency, and so do the recreation problems of large cities. In this long range perspective the politician discovers the harmful effects of a widely scattered population in rural areas far away from cities.

One learns to appreciate the great importance of a settlement policy concentrating on viable living centers. All of this undertaken with the realization that in the future families and farms alike must be enabled to keep fulfilling their service, and may not be frustrated by surrounding land use barriers. The real 'freedom' of a people is at stake here as well.

The harmonizing of needs

The last phase gives rise to the most just policy. In this phase a solution which brings genuinely realizable harmony among those interests has to be sought among the clashing needs which have been discovered. During this last phase wisdom and a keen sense of justice are indispensable prerequisites; if a person is suited for political work, it will be evident here.

It's very difficult to be more specific at this point, but we can make two observations. First, it is a good approach to compare different solutions with one another and to examine how just each is.

[61]

Second, a solution often presents itself when it is recognized that interests, if evaluated properly, often are more interrelated than might appear at first glance. The most harmonious and just solutions are those in which all overlapping and combinational possibilities between the varying interests are utilized to the fullest extent. For example, agrarian and municipal interests compliment each other when agrarian production finds a market in the city, and when it is in the city's recreational interest that agrarian elements be included in the recreational landscape.

X. THE FORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN PARTY

[63] Thus far the central theme of this book has been that the ultimate concern of Christian politics doesn't lie in what Christians could or should accomplish, but in listening to what the gospel itself, through its own initiative, presents as the choice - a choice it continually places before the politician in the midst of his political activity.

By its very nature this theme also has consequences for our thinking about the possible formation of a Christian party. If, in the final analysis, our own Christian activities were central in evangelical politics, then indeed we would have to view the establishment and maintenance of Christian parties as a 'dogma' from which we could never depart. But if what is at stake in evangelical politics is following (and pointing to) what the gospel itself is already doing - challenging Christians and non-Christians alike - then it is impossible for us to regard the formation of Christian parties as a dogma. Whether to form a party should be determined by asking if it is the most effective instrument, in a given time and place, to implement the demands of the gospel in politics. Thus a Christian political party is no more than one of the organizational forms available for evangelical political activity. It can never be an end in itself and neither should it be.

Whether or not a Christian political party is indeed the most effective instrument depends, as we said already, on times and circumstances. Some of the factors which could play a role here are:

The electoral system of a country

When a certain country uses a district or riding system and Christians form a minority group, then a splitting off from the existing large parties may sometimes result in isolation and a missed opportunity to influence these parties.

The character of existing parties

The formation of a Christian party can be an inescapable necessity in a country where the existing 'secular' parties demand total loyalty to their own 'principles' and 'ideology', while in other countries existing election platform parties might give the Christian room to promote his own conviction.

The knowledge and insight of the Christian community

Christian politics demands both political expertise and a [64] living faith. Either one, or both, could be missing to such a degree among the leaders

of Christian political groups, that their public action might break down rather than build up the Christian witness. The establishment or maintenance of a party could be irresponsible in such circumstances.

In addition to this, the Christian party will have to be confronted with the essential demand that it have open eyes for the possibilities of failure, and thus must not equate the content of its actions with 'Christian politics'. The word 'Christian' posits the norm for the party to pat itself on the back. When this is done, it is often furthest removed from the reality of the word 'Christian'.

Arguments in favour of Christian party formation

Some of the positive arguments which, with varying emphases, can be adduced for the establishment or maintenance of a Christian political party are:

'Secular' parties, even when they welcome Christians as members, can often only allow these Christian members limited room. Things are all right as long as the Christian can endorse the party platform out of his own convictions; but it's distressing when a Christian on the basis of his convictions comes to political conclusions other than the one his party is advocating. Then it often appears that these parties value the political convictions of the Christian only when they result in loyalty to, the party line. In a Christian political party, however, an appeal to the gospel as the religious basis of the party is always possible in principle.

Except in exceptional circumstances, Christian politics can never be a one man show. For deepening and correction it requires communion with fellow Christians; for it is basically one of the cultural expressions of the Body of Christ (which may not be identified with existing ecclesiastical structures). It is a perennial question whether this need for experiential community in political activity can ever carve out enough room within secular political parties. A Christian political party by its very definition is already oriented to giving form to this communal experience.

One of the characteristic signs of our time is the secularization and estrangement of practically all sectors of life from the influences and impulses of the gospel. Closely connected with this trend of secularization is the fact that ideological parties are dropping 'out of fashion' and that politics is viewed more and [65] more as an autonomous activity which requires only politically neutral technical expertise. In the midst of a party system

organized according to purely pragmatic motives, a Christian political party could be living sign of the fact that the Kingdom of Christ does not stop at the gates of politics.

Under a democratic form of government, citizens as well as ministers and members of parliament are responsible for the direction of official policy. As Christians we could and should value highly the ability to express with our votes that policy formation can only be correct if politics is faithful to the gospel. But when Christian politicians join one or more 'secular' parties, then usually the possibility of expressing this conviction with his vote no longer exists for the Christian citizen. For when he votes for a fellow Christian who is a candidate for a 'secular' party, his vote in effect goes to that party. An independent candidate could be elected into the House in a specific district or riding, but where this is the case the voters have already in fact formed the basis for independent political action on the part of the chosen delegate who, for the time being, forms a kind of party within parliament.

In our time political problems are becoming more and more complex in character, and it is virtually impossible for the citizen to come to responsible judgment on all the various political problems. Thus in some measure at least, he has to respond by intuitively trusting the spirit of a party tackling old and new political problems. It is a realistic question whether any voter can ever get a sufficient hold over the dominant spirit in parties relying solely on ad hoc election platforms. This problem wouldn't be helped by a very detailed program because in a period of four years new political problems constantly appear. In the long run a party built on principles will win out over a pragmatic platform party. You could even put it this way, because of the spiritual tie which exists between voters and representatives, the democratic influence of the voter who votes for a principle party is in fact deeper and longer lasting than that of the elector who votes for a certain party program.

A conditional yes

When we review the factors and marshalled arguments, it appears that we are fully justified in giving a conditional 'yes' to the future of Christian party formation. The little word 'conditional', however, is indispensable - especially in connection with the future. And that conditional element is related to two things; in the first place, whether [66] a Christian party remains willing to recognize the possibility of its own failure (and consequently rejects all temptations to identify its program with the message of the gospel which transcends *all* programs); and secondly, whether it is and remains willing actually to open itself to the penetrating

work of the gospel. Otherwise it has little in common with the Christian faith except its name, and it makes a laughing stock out of the gospel.

Both these conditions are essentially marching orders, tasks, and responsibilities. Don't let anyone tell you that Christian political action is obsolete. There will always be room for real evangelical political action; the gospel itself is always active in politics and in the entirety of life.