

32. Principles and Political Action

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(page 64)

Introduction

This week the Anti-Revolutionary Party has been in existence for one hundred years, which is a remarkably long period for a political party. That fact becomes even more remarkable, if we notice that this party was, by its constitution, a Christian political party from the beginning, and moreover the first real political party in the history of Dutch democracy. How is it possible to exist as a Christian political party for such a long time? By the power of tradition? If we look at the enormous problems with which this party was confronted during its time of existence - the so-called social question, the problem of the industrial poor, the question of free education, the colonial question, the great crises of the thirties, and the second world war - and the intensive way in which these problems were attacked and handled (rightly in most cases but sometimes also wrongly), then tradition is too weak a basis to explain such a long, continued history. No doubt the deep Christian conviction of the leaders and the members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party played a major role.

This notion leads us immediately to the topic under discussion this morning - the relation between Christian belief and concrete political action. In the context of this week and this day this topic also gets a more specific flavour if we add the question: How have Christians in Holland, in a Christian political tradition of one hundred years wrestled with exactly this relation, and did they find a kind of solution for the basic problem involved?

The problem

Before I try to give an answer, let me first try to elucidate the problem. Why is the relation between Christian belief and political (page 65) action a problem at all? There is no politician without any belief or without any conviction: and it can be said with regard to every politician that his political activity in one way or another is an expression of that conviction or belief.

What is the problem? The answer is no doubt that a Christian belief is more than just a personal matter open to an entirely free interpretation. A Christian belief is a commitment, a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ as the Saviour and the Redeemer of the world, and in that context also a commitment to revealed Truth about His person. It is a commitment to the Bible, to the Gospel itself. Exactly that anchorage, that situation of a consciously chosen permanent link or string with the Revelation of the living God, can pose a problem. Generally, the problem is posed as the problem of the two worlds, the purity of God's Revelation on the one side, and the dirtiness and concrete complexities of ordinary political activity on the other. "East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet", Kipling once wrote. But is not

the same also valid for the relation between the Revelation of God and our ordinary daily political activity? Is it not insane, is it not a violation of the loftiness and the purity of that Revelation, even to try to construct a link between the two? Speaking about the resurrection of Christ seems to belong to a different realm from speaking about the deficit of our balance of payments. Moreover, the moment one tries to construct a bridge to span that gap, you will perhaps not only observe that the holiness of the Biblical message is threatened by that, but that at the same time the Bible is used in an ideological way, namely, as a means to further concrete practical political interests.

If our problem is posed in this way, it has to be granted immediately that there is a great deal of empirical material in political reality which seems to confirm that. Let me just point to the fact that Christian political organizations frequently are led astray by tendencies which may have a Christian outlook but which in fact do not have their origin in Biblical thinking.

(page 66) One tendency is "to be a witnessing party". These parties have a primarily spiritual nature and want to make their political statements in relation to a very specific set of political issues, such as abortion, pornography, the possibility of Christian education, and the preservation of a good family life. Beyond these specific topics, they are mostly just silent or follow the mainstream of conservative political thought.

Another tendency most of our parties must cope with, is to become purely pragmatic in political behaviour. Christian-democratic parties deal with the totality of the political area, but we cannot say that they are all orientated on real inspiration when they are handling the great political issues of today. Our experience shows that time and again Christian-democratic concepts such as freedom and responsibility lose their dynamism because the tie with their source is cut through. It is fair to say that Christianity often functions in a very remote way in our political life.

For this reason we criticize the often-formed practice of the so-called open-programmatic parties in which Christians and non-Christians work together without bothering too much about their different "inspirations".

Another grave error is met in the ideological way in which explicit verbal references are made to Christianity. Sometimes the sole reason to do so is to sell the contents of the party policy to that group of supporters who would like a clear verbal reference to the Biblical truth. I was told that in the United States there is a "Bible belt", a region in the country in which the inhabitants like to be addressed (by for instance candidates for the Presidency) with at least some reference to what the Bible says. Candidates reckon with that and use more Biblical quotations there than elsewhere. Here we have a clear example of an ideological use of the Bible and of Christianity. There is a practical goal to be reached, namely to be elected, and the Bible is used as a means to reach that goal. The expression "christian policy" is often used (in a similar way): not as a norm, which has to be obeyed, but as a label attached to a more or less pragmatic policy which has to be sold (page 67) to the public. This is one of the most evil things which occurred in the history of so-called Christian parties, including the ARP and which still occurs to some extent today. In my opinion, it is such a great and harmful evil, that I personally would prefer membership in a non-Christian party far above membership in a so-called Christian party in which things like this systematically occur. One cannot and may not try to make the Word of God into an extension of one's political desires and let them pass as one's political

purposes.

But that protest, which you will share with me, I hope, does not take away the problem: it even seems to increase it. For if it is true that so-called Christian parties are **either** of the nature of a witness-party, dealing only with a selected list of political items, **or** of the nature of pragmatic or even ideological parties, which make only an ideological use of the Bible to sell their commonplace political products to a traditionally thinking Christian public, then that empirical evidence is the most clear illustration of the obviously existing impossibility spanning the bridge between the Biblical Revelation and the complex reality of today's political activity. "East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet". How should we look upon the relationship between the Light from the East - Ex Orient Lux - and the darkness of our complex policies in Western democracies?

With these three types of threats to Christian democratic policy in mind, I would now like to introduce you further in the way we, in the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party and now in the CDA, are inclined to approach the problem of this apparent gap between Bible and politics.

The Anti-Revolutionary tradition

In the history of the Anti-Revolutionary Party there has been a process of almost uninterrupted reflection on exactly this problem. The reason for that is very plain. From the start, Groen van (page 68) Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper made it very explicit to the Dutch public, whether friend or enemy, that there could be no doubt about the relevancy of the Gospel for the **totality** of political activity. They both abhorred a type of policy which only dealt with a selected list of so-called spiritual items. For them, the Word of God by its own character cannot stop at borderlines such as the borderline between spiritual and natural, church life and political life, and so on. In concrete material life and in the midst of complex social and political realities the Word of God is, and should be made, manifest as **the** message of liberation and redemption. Christ was incarnated, came to this concrete **earth**, worked and lived **here**, Abraham Kuyper said again and again. The Word of God is not far away in heaven, but has come near to us, in the midst of our daily life. You will understand that for the Anti-Revolutionary Party the possibility to withdraw itself into a selective spiritual realm was excluded from the beginning, and correctly so. But this rejected path made it even more necessary to find another way: the way of Christian policy in a non-pragmatic and non-ideological style, dealing with concrete practical issues. But how to find that way?

Looking back at the history of my own party. I have to be honest. Especially in the period between 1910 and 1940 a policy was followed and brought into practice which did not offer a real solution - the policy of the use of so-called derived principles. It was the time of rationalism and neo-scholasticism. An effort was made to derive from the literal text of the Bible in a rational way an impressive set of concrete rules which could be used as recipes to "construct", so to speak, a concrete Christian-political behaviour. These derived rules even extended to the question of free trade, the maintenance of the gold standard, and the acceptability of government enterprises. You may understand what happened. Some of these rules were in conflict with each other, and almost all of them underwent a silent death, because it became clear that they were primarily derived from the human intellect and human political insights, instead of from the living Word of God itself.

(page 69) Gradually the insight grew that these so-called derived principles were to some extent even an insult to what the Word of God really meant in political life, and that in any case they could never form the basis for a sincere Christian behaviour in the field of concrete policy.

But there is also another line visible in the AR history. That line brought the party really further on its way. It is the line which already started in the thought of Groen and Abraham Kuyper, and was elaborated by scholars like Anema, and Dooyeweerd and Mekkes. The characteristic element of that line, which can be called a typically Anti-Revolutionary one, is the continued reflection on the character of the state and on the specific vocation of the government in relation to all its citizens. In that structural analysis, real progress was made in relation to the old question of the relationship between our Christian belief and our behaviour in political reality.

The principle of justice

The essence of this view, especially its significance for the problem of the relation between the Biblical message and political activity, can perhaps be illustrated best by using the symbol of a prism, a symbol once also used by Herman Dooyeweerd. A prism is able to transform a beam of white light into a spectrum of colours which are very different from each other, but nevertheless are the components of one, "undivided" white beam of light. In the same way, it may be said, the Word of God is one dynamic message to mankind, telling one undivided truth about creation, sin, redemption and faith, but it also works itself out in a variety of ways, which receive their respective colours in relation to the different structures of human social reality. In all those structures, an answer has to be given to the Word of God's demand to love God above all and our neighbours as ourselves. But that answer gets its own specific colour according to the social structure in which man has some (leading or serving) specific responsibility. We may speak for example of the family structure with the norm of mutual (page 70) love and trust as its most typical feature and colour: we can speak of the structure of a production household, which can be looked upon as a social bond oriented to the normativity of **oikonomia**, of stewardship; and we can also speak of a crucial normativity which has to be obeyed by the state, namely the normativity of justice. It is crucial because without that normativity the state **as a state** may become a danger for the well-being of its citizens. "Der Staat soll Rechtsstaat sein", "the state has to be a state of justice", Julius Stahl already said one century ago. Groen van Prinsterer added to that statement, that therefore the primary task of a Christian politician in parliament is not to evangelize, but to give witness of the liberating power of the Gospel by **doing** the concrete work of justice. By fulfilling its task of bringing justice to its citizens the government is listening to its own vocation and answers to the one, living Word of God.

But you may now ask what the real Christian element in this line of thought is? For there is no political movement which does not, in one way or another, refer to the necessity of justice within the state. Conservatism, socialism, liberalism, pragmatism, all want justice in their own way, although they do not perhaps make it into such an overall decisive criterion as should be done. What is the difference? Here indeed a second element has to come in - the relation between the idea of justice and the Biblical Revelation itself. What does the Bible really mean when it says that by the will of God governments bring justice and exercise righteousness? What **is**, in a real Biblical sense, justice and righteousness? In the Anti-Revolutionary tradition, again and again the same answer is given to that question: namely justice in relation to government means that every citizen has to be treated as an image-bearer of God,

and therefore has to be given due weight according to his or her **calling**. With this word **calling**, a typically reformational influence comes to the fore. Justice is giving everyone his due part. But to know what that part is, a government must begin to recognize that the call to do justice is not the only call of God in social reality. Families also have their specific calling, (page 71) as well as, for instance, production-households. Being just to them therefore means enabling them to fulfil their **own**, specific calling (of love, of stewardship) in freedom by protecting their rights, by creating the public provisions they need for their private duties, and also, if necessary, by intervening in their behaviour. The last must be the case when people become disloyal to their own primary calling and task to such an extent that public injustice to others is done by them, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The principle of sphere sovereignty

The statement that injustice must be done in relation to and with respect to the specific calling of other societal relations and institutions, is based on the famous Anti-Revolutionary principle of sphere sovereignty. It was already formulated by Abraham Kuyper. It has to be stressed again and again, that here the word "sovereignty" does not relate to the sovereignty or authority of the citizens in which they can or should uphold their own sphere against the authority of the state. Sovereignty here points to the sovereignty, the authority, of the **norms of God** for the entire human social life. That is something different from the authority (and the concrete behaviour) of citizens. Let me just remind you of the prism again.

The one light of the Word of God asks for a differentiated, colourful answer from mankind, differentiated according to a scale of norms and of respective human callings. The state is only one calling, not lower or higher than others, for there are no degrees of holiness in what God asks from mankind. Therefore the government, which is the governing body within the state, has to give ample room to the citizens to fulfill their calling. But if they neglect that calling by their use of power or authority, then the state may have to intervene. For instance, an industrial enterprise which pollutes its environment, is acting in conflict with its own economic mandate (oikonomia means stewardship). If in that case the government will forbid that pollution or restrict it, it is still acting in the full respect for the sphere sovereignty of the social- (page 72) -economic life. For this sovereignty is not equivalent to the authority of entrepreneurs, but to the authority of the Word of God, which asks from all economic subjects obedience to the norm of - also public - stewardship.

The bridge between the Biblical Revelation and political action

Why did I dwell so long on my reference to the principle of justice and the principle of sphere sovereignty when speaking about that great problem of the relationship between our Christian belief and concrete political action?

I hope that you will see the reason for that now. If indeed the Word of God urges us to do justice in the political realm, according to everyone's calling, then exactly this claim **makes** our Christian belief a crucial thing in the midst of the most concrete and complex political issues.

Then there is no more need for wearisome exercises to bridge the supposed gap between Biblical Revelation and concrete political action. For then, by its universal claim to bring justice to the world and to restore people to their calling, it is the Word of God itself which will bridge the gap. It is present in the midst of our political

problems, confronting us with the choice between just and unjust, piercing like a sword through the most private and perhaps selfish considerations of ourselves and others.

After this account, it will not surprise you that the programme of principles of the Anti-Revolutionary Party has never been a very long or extended one. It has always been a very sober programme, with at its heart the famous article 4, which summarizes what I have tried to say. I quote in my own free translation:

The party recognises the government as the servant of God, entrusted with the power of the sword to maintain justice, and in that way to be of service to the people. In the fulfilment of this vocation the Government must recognize the individual calling and responsibility of specific persons and institutions, which - together with the specific character of her vocation - will limit her in the exercise of her power.

(page 73) In a sense, this is enough for formulating the basis of any Christian political party's constitution. In principle no more need be said. But at the same time, it is, in my opinion, a minimum which **has** to be said.

In my opinion references to ideas like freedom, responsibility and use of general formulas which express that the government must promote these things, are not enough for Christian politics. We should not rest until, in a clear and sober formulation, something is said of the Divine specific **calling** of every government which is concentrated in the norm of **public justice**.

For without that clear reference, as we know from our own long history, a development towards either political spiritualism or political pragmatism can scarcely be evaded. Insight into structures and structural mandates is what should characterize Christian democratic principles and practical policy.

However, we cannot say that this objective has already been reached.

Three examples

Until now my account has been rather abstract. Before I reach my final conclusion, it may be good to give some concrete illustrations which not only can shed more light on what I have tried to say about our past, but which also may be of some importance for our future.

- My first example is the **right to resist**. I take this as an example, because the name "Anti-Revolutionary" is up to this day a name which easily creates misunderstandings. It suggests that "Anti-Revolutionaries" are of the opinion that in every situation the authority of government has to be obeyed unconditionally. But I can tell you in all honesty that that opinion is quite un-anti-revolutionary! For example, the members of the AR movement, together with the communists, played the most active role in the resistance-movement against the German occupation (page 74) of Holland in the Second World War.

The puzzle can be solved best by introducing the distinction, made by Groen van Prinsterer in 1860, between the two words: "contra-revolutionary" and "anti-revolutionary". The first word means: opposed to all types of revolution, upholding unconditionally the authority of the present government. But for Groen van Prinsterer, the founding father of the Anti-Revolutionary movement, "anti-

revolutionary" means something different. It stands for the struggle against the **spirit** of revolution, which is the spirit opposed to the authority of God Himself, and as a consequence in most circumstances also opposed to Governmental authority. The importance of this difference becomes clear as soon as we see, that, according to Groen's definition, not only citizens may come in the grip of the spirit of revolution, but also **governments** themselves! Governments can become revolutionaries if they resist the living God by perverting their mandate to do **justice**. If a regime exploits its population and suppresses human civil rights, then it is revolting against God Himself, who gave authority to governments to do justice, and not to abuse their power. So in the AR-tradition, the right to resist suppressive governments is honoured. But not in a simple way. For those who resist can also come in the grip of a revolutionary spirit, a spirit which does not want to serve, but to control, a spirit which does not ask for love, but for revenge. There is abuse of power which asks for resistance in this world, but there is also an idolatry of the revolutionary struggle, which together with the ideology of revolution ought to be rejected from the bottom of our hearts. For not human power must prevail and save us, but the mandate of justice must prevail in the state.

- A **second** example has to do with a problem, which for many years has caused a great deal of difference of opinion within most political parties: the problem of the relation between government, employers' organizations and labour unions. In most of the western democracies, the contacts between these three great powers in every national economy have grown to a great extent in recent (page 75) years. These contacts, either lead to a kind of "social contract" between the three powers, in which the wage-level is agreed upon, together with the development of prices, taxes and some government grants, or to a situation without such a "social contract" here a jungle easily develops, because every "party" claims to have the right to go its own way. Is such a development a good one, a just one, and if not, is there a possibility of escaping from it?

This is one of the practical issues, in which the Roman-Catholic and the Reformational line of political thought tend to lead to different outcomes. In the Roman-Catholic theory the government is the head of the whole "natural" society, which also encompasses the social-economic life of the nation, including labourers and employers. The only principle which prevents the government from developing totalitarian threats is "the principle of subsidiarity": what a lower organ or institution can do should not be done by a higher organ. But in the concrete case mentioned above the rule of subsidiarity fails to some extent. If national economic matters are involved, these matters cannot just be delegated to the workers and the employers. So the best thing to do is to give them a direct voice on the highest level of the state when these matters have to be discussed (solution already *in nuce* defended in the Encyclical **Quadregesimo Anno** 1931).

In an Anti-Revolutionary line of thought, this is not only a wrong solution, but even a dangerous thing to do, for the government has a different calling in relation to society than labourers and employers have. The mandate of the government, which is oriented to the norm of public justice, is at stake here. This means that decisions in relation to social-economic issues, which are necessary from the viewpoint of public justice for all, (measures against inflation, unemployment etc) should **not** be the outcome of a process of mutual negotiation between the government and mighty pressure-groups.

There is no doubt that such a "consensus-policy" will lead to measures which are primarily in favour of those pressure-groups and their members and only secondarily in favour of those groups (page 76) in society which cannot act as a pressure-group at all. Here the basis of the state shifts from justice to pressure, from the sense of righteousness to consensus.

The correct attitude to the problem involved here is of course not to cut through all contacts between the government and the organizations of employers and employees. It is valuable if one knows of the other, what the respective intentions are. But a crucial border is passed if the element of negotiation comes in. For if a negotiation fails, parties are free to do as they like. But in the legal structure of the state, the government can never accept a situation in which free organizations can do as they like, especially if this violates the norm of justice in relation to other vulnerable groups in society: the unemployed, people with fixed incomes, etc. Therefore it is of utmost importance for the government to avoid all situations of **negotiation** with private pressure-groups. Negotiation may be a legitimate figure in social-economic life, but it should not play a role in the administration of public justice.

- A **third and last** example is the difficult question of how Christian policy must relate to the critique of our present social system. Does our Christian conviction lead us to the point of view that we have to criticize our social and economic order or that we have to defend it? And if so, to what degree?

Of course, in the context of this lecture, only a few words can be said. Therefore I want to restrict myself to one aspect of the whole problem, that of the relationship between competences or authorities within our economic system and the corresponding responsibilities which they have to bear. In the conservative tradition, that relationship is already made in an optimal way in our present-day social order. Business life has the task of producing efficiently for the market, a market which should be as free as possible in order to guarantee that consumer-demands are fulfilled. In relation to that responsibility, business life should also have the final authority in investment decisions. Competence and responsibility are therefore in harmony, and (page 77) the government's responsibility and competence should remain restricted to the issue of the protection of human rights and the provision of some checks and balances against too heavy cyclical distortions of economic life. In the socialist point of view, the state is the organ of the whole social and economic order because it is the responsibility of the state to care for all. Therefore socialists make a plea for a radical re-orientation of our social and economic order, leader to further extension of government power and authority in social and economic matters.

In the historical Christian political line of thought both lines of thought cannot be accepted. The reason for this is that the mandate of stewardship is on the one side an **original** mandate of economic life, and therefore not an original mandate of the state (this leads to a clear distinction with the socialistic approach) while on the other hand it has to be said, that this mandate of stewardship involves **far more** than looking for an efficient combination of production-factors for free markets (which makes us diametrically opposed to the conservative approach). In this line of thought, the economic responsibility also relates to the direct responsibility for the preservation of nature; to a direct responsibility for maintaining employment as far as possible; and to a direct responsibility for a real human quality of labour, which is against all ideas that labour is only just a factor of production, with no

reference at all to the issue of a labourer's co-responsibility. (That is, a co-responsibility for the way in which the mandate of stewardship is taken care of in the production household where he or she has to do his job). Therefore, there is indeed a reason to criticize our present structure of society. That structure has to be reorientated because the present arrangement of competences cannot allow real, existing responsibilities of stewardship to be fulfilled. This leads to a two-fold consequence: a) the consequence of government-policy, which brings production households to a better fulfilment of their original tasks. This not only asks for an environmental policy, but also for a policy (page 78) of human standards in the use of labour; and b) the consequence of a government policy which leads to an increased responsibility for labourers in the production households, combined with an explicit arrangement to make it possible that wages are diminished voluntarily in separate production-households if this is necessary for a better fulfilment of the stewardship-tasks of the enterprise. Perhaps this last arrangement will have no success at all, but in any case the legal barriers for going that way have to be removed. For also by bearing economic sacrifices the labourers should become involved in the responsibility of production households to be more open to the divine mandate of stewardship.

The great task of a Christian policy

The three examples mentioned above are of course open for discussion; they are not meant to give the final word on the contents of a Christian policy today. I hope to have made clear in any case, that in the historical line of policy of the Anti-Revolutionary Party we can find an interesting effort to overcome the danger of political spiritualism as well as the danger of an ideological political pragmatism. In that way the input of Anti-Revolutionary thought is not only a question of the past - it should be made fertile for the great task of a Christian polity in the future.

This paper was followed by

W C M Klijn Remarks on 'Principles and Political Action'

pp.79-83

As a catholic theologian listening to your lecture, Mr Goudzwaard, I have come - sometimes with a feeling of humour - to three conclusions:

- 1) that I am proud
- 2) that I have become suspicious
- 3) that I have become more curious.

I am proud

I have heard many thoughts and ideas - and among them the central ones you have expressed - with which I am educated and formed in a catholic tradition, some of them even explicitly confirmed by popes, ideas there which are familiar to me.

The reason why I am proud is that from now on I may call them (typically or even famous) anti-revolutionary insights. I think that that fact at least can give us great confidence in the future of Christian-democracy in our country.

I am thinking especially of all you have said about every man as an image-bearer of God, about his calling, about different specific callings in social reality, about the calling of the state to create, to defend, to promote justice.

Hearing you describe the principle of sphere-sovereignty I was struck by the fact how exactly your words did fit the principle of subsidiarity and I was therefore a little surprised when afterwards you called that same principle not only insufficient, but even dangerous.

I believe that in a more intensive oecumenical dialogue a greater mutual familiarity with each other's notions, concepts and traditions can bring greater clarity and enable us, in formulating a (page 80) common political conviction, not to lose time, or - if you like - to gain time ...

I have become suspicious

Ever since I became interested in Christian democracy I have personally learned, Mr Goudzwaard, not to be too anxious about being suspected. Some months ago, when lecturing to the Young Christian Democrats, I encountered a great deal of suspicion because I talked a lot about the function of reason in politics. Only once I quoted a text of the Gospel and I saw at the same time by the expression of the faces that my reputation was rising, as if I was in a Bible-belt.

This brings us to what is the heart of the question, the question of your lecture. It is a question of hermeneutics, a hermeneutical question, a question of method in daily political life; **how** can a Christian **as** a Christian find relevant political **content** for his action, a content for relevant policy?

In this respect I have become a little suspicious because of what you have said - or

better perhaps: not said - about the question of "mediation between" Christian belief and politics. You began by speaking of a gap: "East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet", about the possibility or impossibility of spanning a bridge between the Biblical Revelation, the Word of God, and the complex reality of today's political activity. And what is your answer after a few pages? The bridge is the Word of God itself. How true that may be in an ontological sense, in the realm of being, is it a solution for a problem of knowledge, a problem of **how** to know; is that answer not a vicious circle?

As democrats and as Christians we ought to ask each other constantly and consistently the question: "How do you know?"

(page 81) This question is crucial if we are to avoid the danger that the Word of God - instead of a bridge - becomes in the hands of human beings - and politicians are human beings - like a long string attached to a kite flying in the air which at each moment can plunge in all directions. This question is vital if we are to avoid the danger that that man has the greatest authority in Christian democracy who speaks with greater emphasis than others about his conscience, where God has spoken to him.

How do we know what calling and stewardship **mean** in 1979 for the lonely, the married, the production-households, the police, the teachers, the army, the officials of the big cities, the workers in health-organizations etc. etc. What does justice mean for the state in a period of economy, of making cuts, not only at short notice but also for the future? And: **how** do you know it? Is it enough that one Christian democrat says to another that his own selfish considerations are already pierced by the Word of God like a sword? When the Word of God itself will bridge the gap, can and does it do so without our created talents, without our brains, without creating our reason that remains nevertheless human reason? Does the Word of God bridge the gap **not** making our human reason more **reason**?

Does He dispense us from the laborious work of analyzing the connections and the trends in our actual society and from building a political view, a political conviction that fits the needs of the future? Is it not the uniqueness of the ethics of Jesus that He calls for the labour of our political reason and fantasy, learning from the past, since the presence of the Kingdom of God is no longer restricted to the letter of the Torah, and each fellow-man, especially the poor, the rejected, the forgotten has become the codex of divine law? Do they not have a human right to the labour of **our** analyzing the ways of **in**justice in order to find the path to justice?

I have become more curious

That may be clear now. I have asked you, Mr Goudzwaard, many questions (page 82) already.

As a conclusion I will put the same matter in the form of some other questions.

- Why have you not spoken about the "historical gap"?
- I do not like speaking of "mediation" as an isolated entity that can live its own life and drift away. But have you not concealed sharp and difficult hermeneutical questions in a "chiffre", in a symbol, the symbol of a prism?
- Is it useful simply to associate the term "autonomy" with human pride?

- Do you not too easily oppose to each other **human** intellect and **human** political insights on the one hand and the living Word of **God** on the other?
- Do we not have an urgent need of a **political conviction** with **real content**,
a political conviction which - just as Rome - cannot be built in one day, **not even in a year and a half**, and **certainly not just by a small committee** clearly composed in a so-called representative way,
a political conviction, not as a fulfilled condition *sine qua non* for the start of the Christian democrat party, but
a political conviction that is never completed and remains a lasting task for all Christian democrats, an atmosphere in which they can live and recognize each other, a set of common views on the main problems of our world,
a political conviction, the life of which will be regulated by the Gospel as *regula fidei*, but
also a conviction for which each Christian democrat has to account in a reasonable and explicit way that cuts off hasty answers and keeps the dialogue going,
a political conviction that has real body to it, real content that one can recognize yet which is ever developing in never-ending discussions in the middle of the history after 1980.

(page 83)

Summary

"Witness-politics": it is not its sole characteristic to select specific issues and items, like abortion, education etc. "Witness-politics" can also extend itself to the whole field of politics. A main characteristic is also a **false identification** of belief and politics. You meet it not only on the conservative side, but also on the left.

The heart of the matter remains: how to avoid a hasty Christian political **positivism** that cuts off all real discussion with accurate arguments? How to avoid that danger?

I am curious about your answer, but especially about the future of Christian democracy.

REPORT OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE PAPER PRESENTED BY B. GOUDZWAARD pp. 83-89

Faith and politics: a question of bridging the gap?

Mr Goudzwaard: (In answer to the reaction of Mr Klijn): I am not sure that I was really dealing with the question of hermeneutics, but if Klijn means that we must find some method for the application of the Word of God to politics then I disagree. Method is a way of using something, but the Word of God cannot be used. We do not need to bridge the gap for it is indeed the very Word of God which bridges the gap. His word

is present in political reality as a call for just and responsible decisions and actions. However, the Christian politician may never identify the Word of God with his political actions and decisions. He may fail; the Word remains true. The risk of using reason, be it **ratio recta**, as a means of bridging the gap is that reason may become all too autonomous in determining what is just in a political situation. Justice is visible only in Christ.

(page 84) Mr Oostlander: I think you misunderstood Mr Klijn. There is a mediation between political life and the Biblical message. That mediation is man, because man mediates in the reading and understanding of the scripture. Man is among other things a rational being. Reason need not be considered autonomous in every situation, as reformed folk are so quickly inclined to do.

I distrust much more any claim to some immediate access to the norm of righteousness such as sensitivity or intuition. As the director of the **Doctor Abraham Kuypersstichting** I know that it takes much wearisome, but at the same time exciting exercise (see Goudzwaard's speech) to translate the gospel in terms of today's political situation.

Doesn't experience **to some extent** generate normativity in a process of learning controlled by Biblical inspiration. Protestants are oriented more to deduction while Catholics are oriented to induction. We must not neglect the latter. Isn't the question of Mr Klijn in this respect important?

The CDU in Germany lays great stress on freedom (**Freiheit statt Sozialismus**). We Dutch Christian democrats are inclined to say, "How conservative!" Indeed from the Dutch experience it would be all too conservative to place the emphasis there, but must one not see the CDU's stress on freedom in its peculiar experience of the iron curtain which cuts through the German people, even breaking up family ties? In Chile one may expect quite another experience and hence quite another political normativity. Mr Reyes Vicuna gave a beautiful image of the difference in perspective: an architect in Europe builds houses with the opening to the south because there the sun will shine most of the time; in Chile architects build houses with the opening to the north. We must take into account that we, being from different cultural backgrounds, have different experiences. However, it would be a very happy result of this conference if we could come to some essential points which we all consider important for the Christian democratic movement in the world.

Mr Van Bochove: I do not agree. The French Protestant and Communist. (page 85) R Garaudy, has said: I do not have faith; faith has me (Parole d'homme). There is not a two-way traffic between heaven and earth. Normativity is a question of one direction; from God to man. We must no longer make ourselves subservient to some political priesthood which determines for us what is normative in politics. Mr Klijn professed agreement with Goudzwaard's emphasis on man as the image-bearer of god, but can the Catholic view of reality really do justice to the implication of this emphasis, namely that the ultimate value of human life lies outside man himself? Doesn't Catholicism tend to view man as a rational being that is self-enclosed? Mr Oostlander thinks that much study is necessary. So do I, we must make much work of listening to the Gospel so that we may clearly perceive what is expected of us. We must however not try to appease the unappeasable.

The CDU's emphasis on freedom we must not try to accommodate to our emphasis on responsibility. The differences between the Catholic and the Protestant political

movement must be brought into the open before we unify into one CDA.

Mr Teunissen: I have, as a Catholic, two comments on this presentation: 1) also Catholics believe that man cannot be saved by reason alone and 2) there is a two-way traffic between God and man for the simple reason that man will always respond to divine Revelation be it in the affirmative or the negative. I appreciate, however, Goudzwaard's appeal for a close relation between Gospel and political action. A spiritual approach to politics is, indeed necessary, an approach which I, too, frankly find lacking in the CDU of West Germany.

Mr Goudzwaard: I missed in Oostlander's presentation a recognition of the Word of God as a dynamic power. God's Word is not just a book that we must use in politics; it is a two-edged sword that cuts to the very root of human life.

Mr Oostlander: But doesn't the Gospel come to us via our human experience?

(page 86) Mr Goudzwaard: Of course, but I don't like the idea of mediation here. The Gospel actualizes itself in the midst of our political problems.

Mr Schaaf: But the Bible is two thousand years old! How can it be applied to today's historical situation without the mediation of our rationality?

Mr Vandezande: Our response to the gospel must not be mistaken for a mediation.

Mr Goudzwaard: That is what I mean. We are very much aware of the normativity in our political situation. That normativity demands our response. However, we must not oppose reason to sensitivity in that response, because it is the **heart** that responds to the call of God's Word. Sensitivity or intuition is needed as much as a clear pattern of thought. Are our political principles the results of our experience in a particular situation? Yes and no. Principles grow out of our intense listening to God's Word in a particular situation. This is something quite different from a mere response to the political situation in which we live. The situation does not give us any normativity for political action. However, it is true that the normativity of the Gospel comes to us in the concrete political situation.

The principle of subsidiarity and the principle of sphere sovereignty: what's the difference?

Mr Goudzwaard: I am not surprised that Mr Klijn, in his response to my paper, sees points of agreement with my presentation of the principle of sphere sovereignty. After all, both the Catholic party and the Protestant parties in Holland have a tradition of political thought which is of a spiritual nature. My objection to the principle of subsidiarity comes down to the following question: by what criterium do we determine who takes the responsibility for a (page 87) certain action? The principle of subsidiarity implies that the choice at which level decisions ought to be taken is determined by the criterium of efficacy or operationality (doelmatigheid). Sphere sovereignty recognizes the original responsibility of the different societal relationships.

Mr Woldring: Why do you stress the difference between the two principles so much. Why elaborate on that difference when there is so much that unites the two. Didn't the encyclical **Quadragesimo Anno** in 1931 explicitly recognize the "sovereignty" of the lower spheres?

Mr Goudzwaard: I too see common elements but, I see that commonness not in the recognition of an original sovereignty in the lower spheres which is resistant to the claims of efficacy in society as a whole. The sovereignty acknowledged by Catholic theory is really delegated sovereignty. What unites both is their rejection of a totalitarian state and an emphasis on the fact that the common good for all does not merely consist of a material well-being. Hence in concrete political activity both principles will often - but not always! - lead to the same conclusions.

The Christian in today's political arena: what is his calling?

Mr Oliemans: What is wrong with the fact that the CDU in W Germany has as its slogan for election "Freedom instead of Socialism" ("**Frieheit statt Sozialismus**")?

Mr Goudzwaard: The word freedom as it is used today has many meanings. The context in which it is used by the CDU makes clear that freedom stands over against "control". I think the Biblical idea of freedom stands over against slavery. Freedom when taken in the first sense means really: to do what you like; in the Biblical sense freedom is closely connected with man's responsibility. Man is freed to serve God and his neighbour. Man is not truly free when he is simply (page 88) allowed to do what he wants to do and when he seeks his happiness in material things. I should think the CDU could serve Christian politics much better if it showed an alternative to the faith in the growth in material welfare.

Mr Skillen: In North America there is no tradition of Catholic or Protestant political thought. I do recognize the need of this thought in order to avoid a pragmatic politics which Goudzwaard also rejects. However, what will happen to the tradition of Christian political thought in Holland when the three Christian parties will combine in the CDA? Will it remain true to its calling or will it slide into a day-to-day pragmatic approach to politics? And what about international co-operation?

Mr Goudzwaard: It is crucial that in the CDA there be a common spirit. The tremendous problems which the CDA will face (nuclear power, energy programmes etc) will demand an in-depth discussion on what is normative in these situations. This can only be attained when the new party remains open to an appeal to the religious roots of those who will work in it. I hope that this openness and this sharing of the Christian commitment will characterize the CDA. On the international level I am much more pessimistic.

Mr Hanson: In how far must Christian politics seek to disentangle the government from its involvement in economic enterprises once such a situation has arisen?

Mr Goudzwaard: The government cannot simply step out of these economic enterprises once it has become involved. It will have to recognize its own responsibility, but at the same time try in the form of a dialogue to point out to the economic institutions their responsibility, namely the call to stewardship.

Mr Hirvonen: Can a Christian political party really function in a society where most people do not consider themselves Christians, not even its own supporters? Can it really appeal to Christian (page 89) principles and ethics in such a context?

Mr Goudzwaard: There is but one normativity which holds for all men. Thus a Christian party need not only appeal to Christians. It may also appeal to others because all men are aware of the existence of some kind of normativity.