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UNIO CUM CHRISTO®

UNION WITH CHRIST

Public Theology, Freedom, and Persecution in Global Perspective

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Mission Statement

Unio cum Christo celebrates and encourages the visible union believers possess in Christ when they confess the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, the body of Christ. Thus, its mission is (1) to be an international scholarly and practical journal for the global Reformed community—churches, seminaries, theologians, and pastors; (2) to encourage deeper fellowship, understanding, and growth in faith, hope, and love in the Reformed community at large; and (3) to support small and isolated Reformed witnesses in minority missional situations. It will seek to do so by the publication and dissemination of scholarly contributions of a biblical, theological, and practical nature by Reformed leaders world-wide—including leading theologians, developing scholars, practicing missionaries, pastors, and evangelists.

Articles, interviews, and book reviews will consistently be in line with biblically based Reformed confessional orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Submitted or solicited contributions for its biannual issues will focus on specific themes of importance to the Reformed tradition and present debate.

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UNDERSTANDING THE VIEWS

INTERVIEW

EDITORIAL

Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*: Dated Yet Relevant

PETER A. LILLBACK

The writings of Francis Schaeffer made a substantial impact on many—including on me. I first read *The God Who Is There* in college, and I was hooked. As I read, I sensed a deep yearning to explain the world from a Christian perspective. I realized a Christian could think seriously about philosophy, art, music, truth, and culture.

In seminary I read *How Then Shall We Live?* and attended Dr. Schaeffer's movie series by the same name. The excitement of seeing Schaeffer in person and reflecting on how history developed from the Reformation to the then present realities of Western culture sparked an interest in the role history could play in apologetics.

In my first pastorate in a small Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania I experienced an epiphany while I was trying to figure out how to do ministry. I again was reading Schaeffer. This time it was *A Christian Manifesto*.[1] It was riveting. Schaeffer's prophetic power compelled me to action. I had never considered the significance of the legalization of abortion for the American experiment in republican government. Convicted of my indifference to the issue and my lack of activity or teaching concerning the unborn, an interest in public theology was born. My resolve to defend the unborn and to increase

[1] Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981). © 1981, pp. 44–45, 99–109, 117–24, 126–30. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

the impact of Christianity on the nation were born in 1983 in my little pastor's study. Bringing the Christian perspective in the public square has been a significant facet of my ministry since. Hence, I am grateful to introduce this issue of *Unio cum Christo* given its focus on public theology.

I. *Gone but Not Forgotten*

If Schaeffer's *Manifesto* had relevance to me and many others almost forty years ago, is it relevant today? After all, his ministry concluded in 1984 after a six-year battle with cancer, just three years after the *Manifesto* was published.[2] Clearly, his writings live on, but the book is dated—much has happened in the intervening years not only pertaining to issues of abortion but concerning many other national moral debates such as same-sex marriage, gender, religious liberty, law enforcement, and race relations.

Nevertheless, Schaeffer's work and thought have not been forgotten. In fact, Schaeffer's *Manifesto* was the introduction to a recent open letter to American pastors by Larry Alex Taunton, who declares,

> A generation ago, pastor and theologian Francis Schaeffer issued a call-to-arms to the American Church in an explosive little book titled *A Christian Manifesto* (1981). Alarmed by the slaughter of the unborn in the wake of Roe v. Wade, Schaeffer called for social action in the form of civil disobedience. The problem as he saw it was a passive, inert, and ineffective church. Corpulent and self-satisfied, it had become the proverbial salt that had lost its savor. According to Schaeffer, this was due to weak pastoral leadership:
>
> > As we turn to the evangelical leadership in the last decades, unhappily we must come to the conclusion that often it has not been of much help …. Spirituality to the evangelical leadership has often not included the Lordship of Christ over the whole spectrum of life ….The old revivals are spoken about so warmly by the evangelical leadership. Yet they seem to have forgotten what those revivals were. Yes, the old revivals in Great Britain, Scandinavia, and the old revivals in this country did call, and without any question and with tremendous clarity, for personal salvation. But they also called for a resulting social action. Every single one of them did this …
>
> Schaeffer's indictment of America's pastors should not upset too many of you since, as old as it is, there are very few of that generation who remain in our pulpits. But were Schaeffer still alive, I fear the knicker-wearing theologian with the Van Dyke beard would be fiercer than ever in light of our current cultural predicament.[3]

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[2] For an insightful personal look at Schaeffer's life and teaching, see William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

[3] Larry Alex Taunton, "A Letter to Americas Pastors and Churches," July 16, 2020, https://larryalextaunton.com/2020/07/a-letter-to-americas-pastors-churches/.

II. *Emphases Driving Schaeffer's* Manifesto*: Revolution and Presuppositions*

To reclaim Schaeffer's *Manifesto* and appreciate its relevance for the church today, we will summarize its argument. But first, to understand the abiding character of his moral vision for this generation, we must grasp two prior concerns of his general perspective on the church and apologetics. Simply put, the *Manifesto* emerges from his call for revolution in the church and a commitment to presuppositional apologetics. These concerns drive Schaeffer's *Manifesto*, energizing its tone and shaping its method. The *Manifesto* is the climax of Schaeffer's cry for revolution, reformation, and revival in the American church:

> Being Christian means affirming certain doctrines, but it also means having a mentality attuned to what God has shown us in His book about the realities of history. And this must be our perspective, for only as men turn back to the One who can really fulfill, return to His revelation, and reaffirm the possibility of having a relationship with Him as He has provided the way through Jesus Christ, can they have the sufficient comfort which every man longs for. There *is* no other way. And if we aren't totally convinced that there is *no* other way, we are not ready for a reformation and revival. We are not ready for the revolution that will shake the evangelical church. If I think there are other final answers in the areas of art, history, psychology, sociology, philosophy, or whatever my subject and whatever my discipline; if I think there are other answers after man has turned away from God, I am not ready for the reformation, the revival, and the revolution—the constructive revolution—which the evangelical church so desperately needs. Our perspective must be the perspective of the Word of God. …
>
> Therefore, in a post-Christian world and in an often post-Christian church, it is imperative to point out with love where apostasy lies. We must openly discuss with all who will listen, treating all men as fellow men, but we must call apostasy, apostasy. If we do not do that, we are not ready for reformation, revival, and a revolutionary church in the power of the Holy Spirit.
>
> We are all too easily infiltrated with relativism and synthesis in our own day. We tend to lack antithesis. There is that which is true God, and there is that which is no god. God is there as against His not being there. That's the big antithesis. … When we see men ignore or pervert the truth of God, we must say clearly—not in hate or anger—"You are wrong."[4]

And similarly, to understand Schaeffer's *Manifesto*, we must appreciate his deep concern for presuppositional apologetics. In his assessment, it is essential to recognize the underlying faith and assumptions of both the Christian and the non-Christian confronting the church if there is to be the

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[4] Francis Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, vol. 4, *A Christian View of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985), 224, 228.

needed revolution, reformation, and revival. Without recognition of the presuppositions that are vying for control of the mind and the public square, one cannot effectively come to grips with the fact that God and his absolutes truly exist. Given the post-Kantian milieu of the West, Schaeffer often addressed the deep dichotomy between what he termed the upper story and lower story expressions of knowledge resulting from post-Enlightenment-shaped thinking. Without the believer's cognition of secular presuppositions, the unbelieving world mystifies the Christian and disregards his message.

Hence, for Schaeffer, philosophical clarity about the world's presuppositions and the impact they are making on the church is foundational to the achievement of the revolution needed in the church.

> Confusion becomes bewilderment, and before long they are overwhelmed. This is unhappily true not only of young people, but of many pastors, Christian educators, evangelists and missionaries as well.
>
> *So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today.*
>
> If you had lived in Europe, let us say prior to about 1890, or in the United States before about 1935, you would not have had to spend much time, in practice, in thinking about your presuppositions. …
>
> What were these presuppositions? The basic one was that there really are such things as absolutes. They accepted the possibility of an absolute in the area of Being (or *knowledge*), and in the area of *morals*. Therefore, because they accepted the possibility of absolutes, though people might have disagreed as to what these were, nevertheless they could reason together on the classical basis of antithesis. They took it for granted that if anything was true, the opposite was false. In morality, if one thing was right, its opposite was wrong. … If you understand the extent to which this no longer holds sway, you will understand our present situation.
>
> Absolutes imply antithesis. The non-Christian went on romantically operating on this basis without a sufficient cause, an adequate base, for doing so. Thus it was still possible to discuss what was right and wrong, what was true and false. …
>
> The shift has been tremendous. Thirty or more years ago you could have said such things as "This is true" or "This is right," and you would have been on everybody's wavelength. People may or may not have thought out their beliefs consistently, but everyone would have been talking to each other as though the idea of antithesis was correct. Thus in evangelism, in spiritual matters and in Christian education, you could have begun with the certainty that your audience understood you.
>
> *Presuppositional Apologetics Would Have Stopped the Decay*
>
> It was indeed unfortunate that our Christian "thinkers," in the time before the shift took place and the chasm was fixed, did not teach and preach with a clear grasp of presuppositions. Had they done this, they would not have been taken by surprise, and they could have helped young people to face their difficulties. The really foolish thing is that even now, years after the shift is complete, many Christians still do not know what is happening. And this is because they are still not being taught the importance of thinking in terms of presuppositions, especially concerning truth.

> The flood-waters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions. …
>
> The use of classical apologetics before this shift took place was effective only because non-Christians were functioning, on the surface, on the same presuppositions, even if they had an inadequate base for them. In classical apologetics though, presuppositions were rarely analyzed, discussed or taken into account.[5]

III. *Selections from Schaeffer's* A Christian Manifesto *Illustrating His Argument*

Thus, the rationale for Schaeffer's *Manifesto* becomes clear. A true revolution calls for a manifesto to explain its commitments. His revolution demanded a sweeping change within the evangelical world by a spiritual revolution to bring God back to the center of all reality. This presuppositional clarity in turn revealed the utter contrast between reality defined by the personal God of Scripture and the secular world that entirely disregarded God and his truth. And such a dynamic revolution of the church, the mind, and the interaction of Christian and non-Christian, necessarily called for a change in secular culture and its values. Nowhere could this revolution by the Christian church be more dramatic than in the antithesis between the Christian's belief in the sanctity of life and the world's celebration of death—the death of the unborn by legalized abortion. From this perspective, the abiding importance and relevance of Schaeffer's *Manifesto* for Christians and the church today become evident.

A Christian Manifesto is composed of ten chapters that provide the rationale and structure for a revolution within the church that sought to mobilize, confront, and change a nation in the clutches of humanist religion that celebrated the destruction of the unborn. A recital of the chapter titles gives a clear sense of his aims for public theology concerning the sanctity of life:

1. The Abolition of Truth and Morality
2. Foundations for Faith and Freedom
3. The Destruction of Faith and Freedom
4. The Humanist Religion
5. Revival, Revolution, and Reform
6. An Open Window
7. The Limits of Civil Obedience

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[5] Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 1, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture*, 6–7.

8. The Use of Civil Disobedience
9. The Use of Force
10. By Teaching, by Life, by Action

Given Schaeffer's gift of passionate analysis, it is preferable to let him speak for himself. Thus, we will offer several selections from his *Manifesto* each introduced by a summary title in italics.

1. *Materialistic Philosophy*

Schaeffer's cultural and presuppositional revolution begins with confronting the "philosophical change to the materialistic concept of final reality"[6] that has occurred in the Western world. He explains,

> [44] This shift was based on no addition to the facts known. It was a choice, in faith, to see things that way. No clearer expression of this could be given than Carl Sagan's arrogant statement on public television—made without any scientific proof for the statement—to 140 million viewers: "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." He opened the series, *Cosmos*, with this essentially creedal declaration and went on to build every subsequent conclusion upon it.
>
> There is exactly the same parallel in law. The materialistic-energy, chance concept of final reality never would have produced the form and freedom in government we have in this country and in other Reformation countries. But now it has arbitrarily and arrogantly supplanted the historic Judeo-Christian consensus that provided the base for form and freedom in government. The Judeo-Christian consensus gave [45] greater freedoms than the world has ever known, but it also contained the freedoms so that they did not pound society to pieces. The materialistic concept of reality would not have produced the form-freedom balance, and now that it has taken over it cannot maintain the balance. It has destroyed it.
>
> … The Durants received the 1976 Humanist Pioneer Award. In *The Humanist* magazine of February 1977, Will Durant summed up the humanist problem with regard to personal ethics and social order: "Moreover, we shall find it no easy task to mold a natural ethic strong enough to maintain moral restraint and social order without the support of supernatural consolations, hopes, and fears."
>
> Poor Will Durant! It is not just difficult, it is impossible. He should have remembered the quotation … from the agnostic Renan …. Renan said in 1866: "If Rationalism wishes to govern the world without regard to the religious need of the soul, the experience of the French Revolution is there to teach us the consequences of such a blunder." … And the Durants themselves say in the same context: "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

[6] Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, 44. The numbers in brackets within the quotations are to the page numbers from which the quotations are taken.

2. *Samuel Rutherford, the Reformation, and Civil Disobedience*

Schaeffer appeals to the Protestant Reformation for the development of the concept of civil disobedience, showing its relevance for the American context. His understanding of an activist church confronting the humanistic culture at war with the God of the Bible finds its intellectual exemplar in the thought of the Scotsman Samuel Rutherford, whose *Lex, Rex* influenced the American Revolution.

[99] Thus, in almost every place where the Reformation flourished there was not only religious noncompliance; there was civil disobedience as well.

It was in this setting that Samuel Rutherford … wrote his *Lex Rex: or The Law and the Prince* (1644). What is the concept in *Lex Rex*? Very simply: The law is king, and if the king and the government disobey the law they are to be disobeyed. And the law is founded on the Law of God. *Lex Rex* was outlawed in both England and Scotland. The parliament of Scotland was meeting in order to condemn Samuel Rutherford to death for his views, and the only reason he was not executed as a civil rebel is because he died first.

In his classic work, *Lex Rex*, Rutherford set forth the proper Christian response to nonbiblical acts by the state. … *Lex Rex*, [100] in a society of landed classes and monarchy, created an immediate controversy.

The governing authorities were concerned about *Lex Rex* because of its attack on the undergirding foundation of seventeenth century political government in Europe —"the divine right of kings." … Rutherford, argued, all men, even the king, are under the Law and not above it. This concept was considered political rebellion and punishable as treason.

Rutherford argued that Romans 13 indicates that all power is from God and that government is ordained and instituted by God. The state, however, is to be administered according to the principles of God's Law. Acts of the state which contradicted God's Law were illegitimate and acts of tyranny. Tyranny was defined as ruling without the sanction of God.

Rutherford held that a tyrannical government is always immoral. He said that "a power ethical, politic, or moral, to oppress, is not from God, and is not a power, but a licentious deviation of a power; and is no more from God, but from sinful nature and the old serpent, than a license to sin."

[101] Rutherford presents several arguments to establish the right and duty of resistance to unlawful government. *First*, since tyranny is satanic, not to resist it is to resist God—to resist tyranny is to honor God. *Second*, since the ruler is granted power conditionally, it follows that the people have the power to withdraw their sanction if the proper conditions are not fulfilled. The civil magistrate … holds his authority in trust for the people. Violation of the trust gives the people a legitimate base for resistance.

It follows from Rutherford's thesis that citizens have a moral obligation to resist unjust and tyrannical government. While we must always be subject to the office of the magistrate, we are not to be subject to the man in that office who commands that which is contrary to the Bible.

…. Only when the magistrate acts in such a way that the governing structure of the country is being destroyed—that is, when he is attacking the fundamental structure of society—is he to be relieved of his power and authority.

That is exactly what we are facing today. The whole structure of our society is being attacked and destroyed. It is being given an entirely opposite base [102] which gives exactly opposite results. The reversal is much more total and destructive than that which Rutherford or any of the Reformers faced in their day.

3. *Rutherford's Perspective on Civil Disobedience Is Still Legitimate*

Schaeffer insisted, then, that there are times when civil disobedience is a legitimate step for a Christian. He writes,

[103] Civil disobedience is, of course, a very serious matter and it must be stressed that Rutherford was the very opposite of an anarchist. In *Lex Rex* he does not propose armed revolution as an automatic solution. Instead, he sets forth the appropriate response to interference by the state in the liberties of the citizenry. Specifically, he states that if the state deliberately is committed to destroying its ethical commitment to God then resistance is appropriate.

In such an instance, for *the private person*, the individual, Rutherford suggested that there are three appropriate levels of resistance: *First*, he must defend himself by protest (in contemporary society this would most often be by legal action); *second*, he must flee if at all possible; and *third*, he may use force, if necessary, to defend himself. One should not employ force [104] if he may save himself by flight; nor should one employ flight if he can save himself and defend himself by protest and the employment of constitutional means of redress. Rutherford illustrated this pattern of resistance from the life of David as it is recorded in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, when the state commits illegitimate acts against *a corporate body*—such as a duly constituted state or local body, or even a church—then flight is often an impractical and unrealistic means of resistance. Therefore, with respect to a corporate group or community, there are two levels of resistance: remonstration (or protest) and then, if necessary, force employed in self-defense. In this respect, Rutherford cautioned that a distinction must be made between a lawless uprising and lawful resistance.

For *a corporate body* (a civil entity), when illegitimate state acts are perpetrated upon it, resistance should be under the protection of the duly constituted authorities: if possible, it should be under the rule of the lesser magistrates (local officials). Rutherford urged that the *office* of the local official is just as much from God as is the *office* of the highest state official.

4. *John Locke, John Witherspoon, and Os Guinness on the Legitimate Use of "Force"*

[105] [John] Locke, though secularizing *Lex Rex* and the Presbyterian tradition, nevertheless drew heavily from it. Locke made four basic points:

1. inalienable rights;
2. government by consent;
3. separation of powers;
4. the right of revolution (or you could word it, the right to resist unlawful authority).

These were the four points of Locke which were acted [106] upon by the men among the American Founders who followed Locke.

[John] Witherspoon certainly knew Samuel Rutherford's writing well. The other Founding Fathers may have known him. They certainly knew about Locke. And for both *Lex Rex* and Locke there comes a time when there must be civil disobedience on the appropriate level. One begins not on the highest level, but on the appropriate level at one's own point of history.

Many within the Christian community would agree that Christians can protest and take flight in the face of state oppression. However, force of any kind is a place where many Christians stop short.

Force, as used in this book, means *compulsion* or *constraint* exerted upon a person (or persons) or on an entity such as the state.

When discussing force it is important to keep an axiom in mind: always before protest or force is used, we must work for reconstruction. In other words, we should attempt to correct and rebuild society before we advocate tearing it down or disrupting it.

If there is a legitimate reason for the use of force, and if there is a vigilant precaution against its overreaction in practice, then at a certain point a use of force is justifiable. We should recognize, however, that overreaction can too easily become the ugly horror of sheer violence. Therefore, the distinction between force and violence is crucial. Os Guinness in *The Dust of Death* writes: [107] "Without such a distinction there can be no legitimate justification for authority or discipline of any kind, whether on a parental or on a presidential level. In a fallen world the ideal of legal justice without the exercise of force is naïve. Societies need a police force, a man has the right to defend his wife from assault. A feature of any society which can achieve a measure of freedom within form is that responsibility implies discipline. This is true at the various structural levels of society—in the sphere of the state, business, the community, the school, respectively."[7]

In a fallen world, force in some form will always be necessary. We must not forget that every presently existing government uses and must use force in order to exist. Two principles, however, must always be observed. *First*, there must be a legitimate basis and a legitimate exercise of force. *Second*, any overreaction crosses the line from force to violence. And unmitigated violence can never be justified.

As Knox and Rutherford illustrate, however, the proper use of force is not only the province of the state. Such an assumption is born of naïveté. It leaves us without sufficient remedy when and if the state takes on totalitarian dimensions.

One factor today that is different from Rutherford's day is that due to the immense power of the modern state there may be no place to flee. The Pilgrims could escape tyranny by fleeing to America. …

[108] At this time in our history, protest is our most viable alternative. This is because in our country the freedom that allows us to use protest to the maximum still exists. However, we must realize that protest is a form of force. This is very much so with the so-called "nonviolent resistance." This was, and is not a negation of force, but a choice of the kind of force to be used.

In our day an illustration for the need of protest is tax money being used for abortion. After all the normal constitutional means of protest had been exhausted, then what could be done? At some point protest could lead some Christians to refuse to pay some portion of their tax money. Of course, this would mean a trial. Such a

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[7] Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 177–78.

move would have to be the individual's choice under God. No one should decide for another. But somewhere along the way, such a decision might easily have to be faced. Happily, at the present time in the United States the Hyde Amendment has removed the use of national tax money for abortions, but that does not change the possibility that in some cases such a protest would be the only way to be heard. One can think, for example, of the tax money going to Planned Parenthood which is openly a propaganda agency for abortion.

[109] The problem in relation to a state public school system is not just an abstract possibility. As I write, a case of undue entanglement and interference is in the courts in a situation that corresponds exactly to Samuel Rutherford's concept of the proper procedure for *a corporate body* to resist.

[117] There does come a time when force, even physical force, is appropriate. … This was the situation of the American Revolution. The colonists used force in defending themselves. Great Britain, because of its policy toward the colonies, was seen as a foreign power invading America. The colonists defended their homeland. As such, the American Revolution was a conservative counter-revolution. The colonists saw the British as the revolutionaries trying to overthrow the legitimate colonial governments ….

A true Christian in Hitler's Germany and in the occupied countries should have defied the false and [118] counterfeit state and hidden his Jewish neighbors from the German SS Troops. The government had abrogated its authority, and it had no right to make any demands.

This brings us to a current issue that is crucial for the future of the church in the United States—the issue of abortion. What is involved is the whole issue of the value of human life. A recent report indicates that for every three live births, one child is aborted. Christians must come to the children's defense, and Christians must come to the defense of human life as such.

5. *The Christian's Fourfold Defense of the Unborn*

[118] [The defense of the unborn] should be carried out on at least four fronts:

First, we should aggressively support a human life bill or a constitutional amendment protecting unborn children.

Second, we must enter the courts seeking to overturn the Supreme Court's abortion decision.

Third, legal and political action should be taken against hospitals and abortion clinics that perform abortions.

In order to operate, many hospitals and abortion clinics receive tax money in some form—at least from individual states. Our representatives must be confronted with political force (if they will not do so out of principle) into introducing legislation cutting off such funds. If this fails, then lawsuits should be initiated to stop such funds from flowing to such institutions. [119] Simultaneously with these steps, some Christians have picketed ….

[120] *Fourth*, the State must be made to feel the presence of the Christian community.

State officials must know that we are serious about stopping abortion, which is a matter of clear principle concerning the babies themselves and concerning a high

view of human life. This may include doing such things as sit-ins in legislatures and courts, including the Supreme Court, when other constitutional means fail. We must make people aware that this is not a political game, but totally crucial and serious. And we must also demonstrate to people that there is indeed a proper *bottom line*. To repeat: the *bottom line* is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state.

6. *Four Reasons Why Civil Disobedience Is "Scary"*

[120] Of course, this is scary. There are at least four reasons why.

First, we must make definite that we are in no way talking about any kind of theocracy. Let me say that with great emphasis. Witherspoon, Jefferson, the American founders had no idea of a theocracy. That is made plain by the First Amendment ….

[121] We must not confuse the Kingdom of God with our country. … "We should not wrap Christianity in our national flag."

Second, it is frightening when we realize that our consideration of these things, and this book, will certainly [122] get behind the Iron Curtain and into other tyrannical countries where Christians face these questions in practice every day of their lives, in prison or out of prison. Their position is very different from ours. We have freedom from physical oppression and they do not. … Jan Pit in *Persecution: It Will Never Happen Here?* writes about one of the restrictions on religious freedom in Iron Curtain countries: "Christians are forbidden to teach religion to children; therefore Sunday schools and youth gatherings are not allowed. Even within the home, Christian training is not to take place." That clearly disobeys God's commands —as well as the parent's deepest longings if indeed [123] the parents believe Christ is the way of eternal life—and the law would have to be disobeyed. Civil disobedience in that case would be continuing the instruction and, if apprehended, paying the price of being sent to the labor camps in Siberia, which at times still means certain death, and certainly suffering. …

[124] *Third*, speaking of civil disobedience is frightening because of an opposite situation from the second. That is, with the prevalence of Marxist thinking—and especially with the attempted synthesis of Marxism and Christianity in certain forms of liberation theology in South America and other places—what we are saying could become a Marxist and terrorist tool to bring anarchy. …

[126] And *fourth*, we must say that speaking of civil disobedience is frightening because there are so many kooky people around. People are always irresponsible in a fallen world. … Anarchy is never appropriate.

But these very real problems do not change the principle that the men of the Reformation and the Founding Fathers of the United States knew and operated on. This principle is that there is *a bottom line* that must be faced squarely if the state is not to become all-powerful and usurp God's primacy. We must recognize that there is a *bottom line if we are to have real freedom of thought and action at the present time—even if, happily, we never reach that bottom line*. If we have not faced the possibility of civil disobedience, if needed, our thinking and action at the present time will lack the freedom they should have. Locke understood that. [127] Without the possibility of his fourth point—the right to resist unlawful authority—the other three would have been meaningless ….

7. America's Declaration of Independence Illustrates the Legitimacy of Civil Disobedience

[127] The colonists followed Rutherford's model in the American Revolution. They elected representatives from every state who, by way of the Declaration of Independence, protested the acts of Great Britain. Failing that, they defended themselves by force.

The Declaration of Independence contains many elements of the Reformation thinking of Knox and Rutherford and should be carefully considered when discussing resistance. It speaks directly to the responsibility of citizens concerning oppressive civil government.

After recognizing man's God-given rights, the Declaration goes on to declare that whenever civil government becomes destructive of these rights, "it is the right of the people to alter and abolish it, and institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its power in such [128] form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." The Founding Fathers, in the spirit of *Lex Rex*, cautioned in the Declaration of Independence that established governments should not be altered or abolished for "light and transient causes." But when there is a "long train of abuses and usurpations" designed to produce an oppressive, authoritarian state, "it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government …"

Simply put, the Declaration of Independence states that the people, if they find that their basic rights are beings systematically attacked by the state, have a duty to try to change that government, and if they cannot do so, to abolish it.

Numerous historians have noted the strong religious influence on the American Revolution. … [Perry Miller] concluded in *Nature's Nation*: "Actually, European deism was an exotic plant in America, which never struck roots in the soil. 'Rationalism' was never so widespread as liberal historians, or those fascinated by Jefferson, have imagined. The basic fact is that the Revolution had been preached to the masses as a religious revival, and had the astounding fortune to succeed."

The importance of America's clergy has been too often ignored as a primary factor in the coming revolution [129] and the support of it. They were called the "black regiment"—referring to their clerical robes—of the revolution. Professor Miller's words are vitally important:

> [We] still do not realize how effective were generations of Protestant preaching in evoking patriotic enthusiasm. No interpretation of the religious utterances as being merely sanctimonious window dressing will do justice to the facts or to the character of the populace. Circumstances and the nature of the dominant opinion in Europe made it necessary for the official statement [that is, Declaration of Independence] to be released in primarily "Political" terms—the social compact, inalienable rights, the right of revolution. But those terms, in and by themselves, would never have supplied the drive to victory, however mightily they weighed with the literate minority. What carried the ranks of militia and citizens was the universal persuasion that they, by administering to themselves a spiritual purge, acquired the energies God has always, in the manner of the Old Testament, been ready to impart to His repentant children.

And we must again remember the *Wall Street Journal's* statement about the place the earlier revivals had in America "that helped sow the seeds of the American Revolution." …

> The thirteen colonies concluded that the time had come and they disobeyed. We must understand that for Rutherford and Locke, and for the Founding Fathers, *the bottom line* was not an abstract point of conversation over a tea table; at a certain point it had [130] to be acted upon. The thirteen colonies reached the bottom line: they acted in civil disobedience. That civil disobedience led to open war in which men and women died. And that led to the founding of the United States of America. … And to [the Founding Fathers] the basic *bottom line* was not pragmatic; it was one of principle.
>
> Please read most thoughtfully what I am going to say in the next sentence: If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the Living God. If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been put in the place of the Living God, because then you are to obey it even when it tells you in its own way at that time to worship Caesar. And that point is exactly where the early Christians performed their acts of civil disobedience even when it cost them their lives.

Conclusion

We face an even more secular world than that confronted by Schaeffer. Contemporary issues of moral concern are more intense than the humanist culture of his day. The older humanist secularism has morphed into what James Kurth in his essay in this issue denominates "global progressivism." What do civil disobedience and the legitimate use of "force" mean in our milieu?

Given the ascendancy of cultural Marxist hostility seeking to demolish historic Christianity, Schaeffer's appeal to Rutherford and Bob Dylan serve as a fitting conclusion to this refresher on his *Manifesto*. Rutherford and Dylan would have understood each other. In "When You Gonna Wake Up," from the album *Slow Train Coming*, Dylan has these lines:

> Adulterers in churches and pornography in the schools
> You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules.
> When you gonna wake up,
> When you gonna wake up,
> When you gonna wake up
> And strengthen the things that remain?

The difference in the centuries, and the difference in the language used, changes nothing.

Schaeffer's concern for the church, although dated, is relevant for the church today. We still await his authentic revolution, reformation, and revival. Yes, Schaeffer is gone. But the revolutionary message of his *Manifesto* should not be forgotten.

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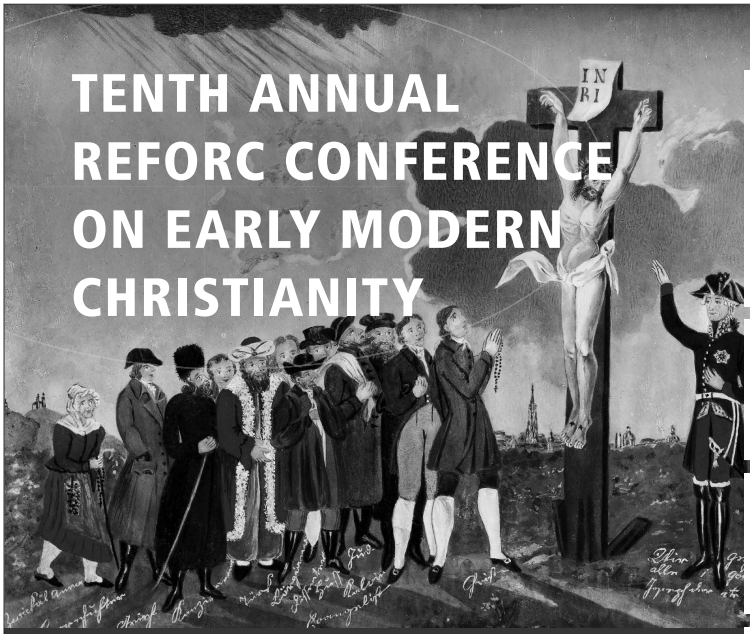

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SPECIAL GUEST ESSAY

New Secular Religion and the Clash with Neotraditional Great Religions

JAMES KURTH

Abstract

The United States in 2020 is in the midst of its greatest crisis since that of the Great Depression and the Second World War. This crisis is the result of large numbers of Americans, especially elite Americans, abandoning the traditional American religion, which was originally based upon Reformed Protestantism, and replacing it with a new secular religion, which is global progressivism. The determined efforts of these elites to promote this secular and postmodern religion on a global scale have produced a determined resistance, also on a global scale. This global resistance is mounted by several neotraditional religions and their civilizations, which are the contemporary heirs of such ancient and traditional religions as Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Keywords

American Creed, Axial Age civilizations, globalization, global progressivism, neotraditional civilizations, public theology, Reformed Protestantism, secularization, secular religion, Western civilization

The United States in 2020 is in the midst of the greatest crisis since the 1930s and 1940s, which was the result of the Great Depression and the Second World War. The roots of the current crisis go back several decades, fundamentally to the 1960s, when large numbers of Americans began to abandon the Christian religion—the "faith of their fathers"—and to replace it with a new religion, that of secular humanism.

In the ensuing decades, secular humanism steadily developed into a more and more complex and articulated religion.[1] In politics and policies, it went from being liberal to being progressive. In scope, it went from being internationalist to being globalist. In its animus, it went from being secular to being actively anti-Christian. By the 2010s, this new secular religion had become what can be termed global progressivism. It saw its moral imperative, its greatest commandment, to be "social justice."

By this time, global progressivism was the faith of most of the elites—the establishment—of the United States. This included the political elites, especially those of the Democratic Party, but also much of the leadership of the Republican Party; the economic elites, especially those engaged in the global economy; the bureaucratic elites, especially the career civilian officials in the federal government; the media elites; and virtually all of the academic and educational elites. At the commanding heights of the American establishment was the administration of President Barack Obama, which very much represented the vision and the values of the new religion. One might even say that it was the *de facto* public theology of the United States.

Because the United States has been the leading power—indeed "the sole superpower"—since the end of the Cold War in 1989–1991, the American establishment has promoted this new religion of global progressivism throughout the world. By the 2010s, it had been doing so for more than two decades, and it had come to believe that there was no other way to order the world and its future. And, in the 1990s, there had indeed been no effective resistance anywhere to the grand United States project of globalization and its accompanying religion, whose central elements were often described as liberal democracy, market economy, open society, and universal human rights.

However, at the beginning of the 2000s—and the beginning of the twenty-first century and also of the third millennium—the first substantial resistance to this grand United States project and new religion appeared, and it appeared with a big bang, that is, the attacks by Islamist terrorists on the

[1] Joshua Mitchell, "A Godless Great Awakening," *First Things*, July 2, 2020, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/07/a-godless-great-awakening.

World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. This Islamist resistance was later joined by resistance from a reviving Russia, and then from a much more formidable rising China. As different as these three sources of resistance have been, they all reject the American way of globalization and its religion of global progressivism. And they have often legitimated their resistance with appeals to their particular traditional, historical religions. In the case of Islamism, this is of course, Islam; in the case of Russia, it is Eastern Orthodoxy; and in the case of China, it is "Asian values," or modernized elements of Confucianism. These are "neo" versions of older religions.

Then, in 2016, substantial resistance to the globalization project and global progressive religion appeared in the United States itself. This was realized in the election to the office of president of Donald Trump, who represented the substantial number of Americans who had been left behind and marginalized by economic globalization (industrial workers and small businesses) or who had been berated and marginalized by religious progressives (e.g., Evangelical Protestants and traditional Roman Catholics). However, although Trump was elected, the combined resistance of the US elites—those on top of the sectors of politics, economics, bureaucracy, media, and academia—made it almost impossible for him to govern.

Thus, at the beginning of 2020, the United States political system was almost completely polarized and dysfunctional. It seemed that the 2020 presidential election itself could produce a grave political crisis. Then came the uniquely deep and disruptive crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, or more accurately, a succession of medical, economic, and political crises that unfolded within the overall coronavirus crisis, making it into a coronavirus catastrophe.

In this essay, we will discuss the original American religion, which was Reformed Protestantism and which provided the original American public theology. We will see how this original American religion was transformed over time into its complete opposite, the new American religion, first of secular humanism and then of global progressivism. We will then discuss how this new religion has provoked the increasingly effective resistance of the contemporary heirs to several of the traditional great religions, especially, Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Confucianism.

What America will be like after it has experienced the full impact of the coronavirus catastrophe is known only to God, who superintends the rise and fall of the nations. But just as the new American religion of global progressivism brought an end to the reign of the traditional American religion of Reformed Protestantism, so too the resistance of the neotraditional

heirs to the older great religions will bring about an end to the reign of this new American religion.

I. *Protestantism versus All Other Religions*

As Alexis de Tocqueville and numerous social analysts since have observed, the identity of Americans, especially the original Anglo-Americans, was greatly shaped by their particular religion. This was, of course, Protestantism, and especially Reformed Protestantism. As we shall see, this product of the epic struggles of the Protestant Reformation was a distinctive and unusual religion indeed. This has made the American view of the rest of the world—and particularly of other religions and civilizations—distinctive and unusual too.[2]

Protestantism was a protest, a protest against the form that the Christian religion had taken in the Roman Catholicism of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Protestant Reformation was an effort to reform the Christian religion back to the original faith expressed in the New Covenant or New Testament of the Bible.

All religions are unique, but Protestantism is unique in more ways than any other. No other religion is so critical of hierarchy and community, or of the traditions and customs that go with them (and therefore critical of much of what makes up a traditional civilization). Indeed, most other religions are based upon hierarchy or community (in addition to Roman Catholicism, also Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, and even, to a degree, Buddhism). At its doctrinal base, however, Protestantism is anti hierarchy and anti community. The Protestant Reformers therefore sought to remove hierarchy and community so that the individual Christian believer could have a direct relationship with God. (More accurately and subtly, so that the individual believer could have a relationship with God directly through the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, and so that he could receive salvation from God directly from the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.)

The removal of hierarchy and community, traditions and customs—of any earthly intermediaries between the individual and God—strips away, at least for the most important or spiritual purposes, any local, parochial, cultural, or national characteristics of the believer. In principle, grace, faith,

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[2] Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

and salvation can be received by anyone in the world; they are truly universal or catholic, in the original sense of the latter term. The Protestant Reformers saw the vast variety of other religions and cultures, and they did so from a universal perspective, one that was even more universal than that of the Roman Catholic Church. This put them on a collision course with most of the other religions and therefore with the civilizations which these religions had produced.

II. *From Reformed Protestantism to American Creed to Universal Human Rights*

In the three centuries after the Reformation, the Protestant rejection of hierarchy and community in regard to salvation spread to their rejection in other domains of life as well. In the new United States the secularizing of the Protestant Reformation gave birth to what by the early twentieth century would become known as the American Creed.[3] The fundamental elements of that secular creed—liberal democracy, free markets, constitutionalism, and the rule of law—were already fully in place in the United States by the early nineteenth century. For many Americans, the Protestant creeds would be replaced by the American Creed, which reached its fullest articulation in the first half of the twentieth century. This American Creed definitely did not include as its elements hierarchy, community, tradition, or custom. Although the American Creed was not itself Protestant, it was clearly the product of a Protestant culture and was a sort of secularized version of Protestantism. The American Creed was the core of what Louis Hartz and others have called the liberal tradition in America, but this liberal tradition was also very much a sort of secularized Protestantism.[4]

Ultimately, in the second half of the twentieth century, the American Creed (and the liberal tradition) would themselves be replaced by a new and universal creed, such as universal human rights, or more accurately the elements of the American Creed would be generalized into universal norms. Under the hegemony or leadership of the United States, the American Creed first became the core ideals of Western civilization, and then universal human rights became the core ideals of what is now the contemporary global civilization. Its religion is what we have called global progressivism.

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[3] James Kurth, *The American Way of Empire: How America Won a World—But Lost Her Way* (Washington, DC: Washington Books, 2019), chapter 2; Huntington, *Who Are We?*

[4] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

III. *Postmodern Global Progressivism versus Ancient Great Religions*

The Christian religion was fundamental in the origin and development of what became Western civilization.[5] In a similar way, other religions were fundamental in the origin and development of other civilizations. Leading examples have been Hinduism and Indian civilization, Confucianism and Chinese civilization, Eastern Orthodoxy and Russian or Slavic civilization, and Islam and the civilization of Muslim peoples. Now, in our own time, there is an emerging global civilization, a civilization that self-consciously has rejected all previous religions, especially Christianity, and claims to have gone beyond religion altogether. Led by the United States, this global civilization is now confronting a variety of other, regional, civilizations which are the heirs of religions whose origins lie in distant, even ancient, times. This is producing what indeed is a clash of civilizations, one that warrants our examination.[6] The rest of this essay will focus upon this clash of civilizations, and upon the clash of the religions which these civilizations embody and represent.

IV. *The Axial Age Civilizations: The Great Religious Transformations*

One of the premier scholars of comparative civilizations in the late twentieth century was Shmuel Eisenstadt, an Israeli sociologist who taught for many years at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, right at the center of repeated clashes of religions and their civilizations. Eisenstadt, and before him, the distinguished German philosopher Karl Jaspers, proposed an important and fundamental way of thinking about civilizations.[7] Eisenstadt argues that the origins of most of the great civilizations of today lie in a particular period, the "Axial Age," which occurred two-and-a-half millennia ago (i.e., around the sixth century BCE). It was at this time that several regions of the world (e.g., China, India, Persia, Israel, and Greece) each underwent a great religious transformation. The new religions became the basis for new civilizations. The legacies of these religions and civilizations persist even today, and they continue to shape the great conflicts (and also the modes of cooperation which often are parallel and interacting with these conflicts)

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[5] James Kurth, "Western Civilization: Our Tradition," *Intercollegiate Review* (Winter/Spring 2004): 10–18.

[6] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[7] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *The Origins and Diversity of Axial-Age Civilizations* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986); Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and the Goal of History* (London: Routledge, 1953).

of our own time. These several religious transformations were of course different from each other in many important ways. But they generally shared several characteristics which set them apart from the worldviews and ways of life which existed before the Axial Age, which continued to exist for millennia in other regions of the world (e.g., Africa, pre-Columbian America, and, in an anomalous way, even Japan) and which, as we shall controversially argue, have reappeared in much of the modern, and now postmodern, global civilization of our own time.

Recapitulating Eisenstadt, we observe that the great religious transformations of the Axial Age comprised three component transformations or shifts of societal focus: (1) from human needs to divine norms; (2) from adaptive rationality to introspective self-reflection; and (3) from human or societal purpose to human, including personal, freedom. Together, these three shifts of societal focus in effect amounted to raising a society up and realigning it on an entirely new axis, a great transformation indeed.

It is, however, natural (in several senses of the word) that after a time a society, or at least important elements within it, will be drawn back to the old ways of looking at the world and of doing things, that is, to become less focused on the transcendent and more upon the imminent, to become less reflective and more instrumental, and to become more collective or societal and less personal or individual. In other words, it is common for many elements of a society to fall away, to again become worldly, and indeed to revert to the natural man. However, other elements of the society will resist and contest this natural (and naturalizing) process and will seek to recall the society to the grand transcendent vision of its earlier great religious transformation. Thus, all Axial Age civilizations have developed fundamentalist movements within their core religions, and within their core states, which are the principal earthly powers within these civilizations. These movements continually resurrect their religious traditions, and, in doing so, they continually restructure their core states.

This process of continual resurrection and restructuring is shaped by the creative tensions between four contrasting polarities or priorities: (1) the transcendental versus the mundane; (2) the universal versus the particular; (3) the totalist versus the pluralist; and (4) the orthodox versus the heterodox. These creative tensions are not just expressed in contrasting intellectual (and theological and ideological) conceptions; they are embodied in contesting elements or groups within the civilization and within its core, or civilizational, state. This core, or civilizational, state serves as the central and hegemonic state within the civilization, usually providing the political and military power to protect, promote, and project the civilization.

Adding to Eisenstadt, we can also observe that most of the Axial Age religions had the following features:

(1) Texts, usually sacred scriptures ("In the beginning was the Word"). The learning of these *texts* was accompanied by *tests* (in a process known popularly as "tests and texts" or "TNT"), most famously in traditional China beginning with the Tang dynasty.

(2) Interpretation of the texts by a literate, learned group, that is, a rabbinate (Judea), scholar-gentry (China), or priesthood (as would later develop in Christianity). This resulted in a perpetual tension between the sacred *word* and the actual *world*, that is, between the transcendental and the mundane.

(3) This in turn resulted in institutionalized tensions between the following: (a) the priests versus the princes (who claimed to be the rulers of earthly life); (b) the priests versus the prophets (who claimed that they had a more direct revelation of the divine than did the priests); and (c) the priests versus the people (whose conditions of life were very different from the priestly elite and who naturally developed very different perspectives). In short, in almost all of the Axial Age civilizations, there were institutionalized tensions between different centers of power. (However, an important exception to these particular kinds of institutionalized tensions, each of which involved priests, was Classical Greece and Rome, where priests were not very central to the society.)

Each of the new Axial Age religions, of course, created some kind of new theology. However, most of them did not create anything like a public theology. Therefore, our own idea of public theology would have been incomprehensible in those civilizations. However, there were two exceptions to this generalization. One was the civilization of Classical Greece and Rome. Indeed, it was this civilization that invented the idea, indeed the very word, of public, as famously expressed in "republic," or "the public thing." However, any theology of Classical Greece and Rome, with all their many, all-too-human, gods and goddesses, was very thin and primitive.

The other exception was ancient Israel. In it was created the most innovative and profound theology of all, that presented in the Bible. And with it was created a covenantal people, the Israelites. And so was created the first public theology. The public theology of ancient Israel should remain a model for public theology, right down to the present day. And for much of American history, some version of this Israelite public theology was indeed the operating public theology of the American people, right down to the 1950s. A prime example is how the political order ordained in Deuteronomy 1 is recapitulated in the political order established by the United States Constitution.

V. *The Origins of Western Civilization in Ancient Greece and Rome*

The principal origins of the Western civilization lay in an earlier one, which was the civilization formed by ancient Greece and Rome and which has often been termed the Classical civilization. Greece itself did not provide a core state for the Classical civilization, although Athens aspired to that role during the Peloponnesian War, and Macedonia aspired to it under Alexander the Great. Instead, it was Rome that eventually became the core state for Classical civilization. Indeed, the Roman achievement in this role was so successful and impressive that Rome and its empire set the standard for what a core state and empire should be, especially in the minds of its successor states in both Western Europe (or the lands of Roman Catholicism) and Eastern Europe (the lands of Eastern Orthodoxy) and for a millennium-and-a-half after the final fall of Rome (the Western Roman Empire) in the fifth century Common Era.

VI. *The Union of the Classical and the Jewish Civilizations: Christendom*

This core state of the Classical civilization, Rome, famously and utterly destroyed the core state of the Jewish civilization, Judea, in 70 CE. However, there soon came about a union of the two civilizations (in other words, the union of Athens/Rome and Jerusalem) in the extraordinary form of Christianity. This new religion eventually formed the Christian civilization, which until the eighteenth century was often termed Christendom. As a union of two civilizations, Christendom was in many ways unique among the great civilizations. The union of elements of the Classical and the Jewish civilizations certainly incorporated yet another creative and distinct tension within the new Christian civilization.

In contrast to the *union* of the Classical and the Jewish civilization within the Christian civilization, there eventually came yet another new religion which represented the *supersession* of both major portions of the Christian civilization and surviving remnants of the Jewish civilization, as well as of earlier pagan (i.e., pre–Axial Age) societies within the region of Arabia. This supersessionist religion was Islam, and it soon conquered not only the eastern and southern peripheries of the Christian civilization but also the core of the Persian civilization.

VII. *The Evolution of the Christian Civilization*

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Western or Latin Christendom never had a real core or civilizational state. The Holy Roman Empire, as its name proclaimed, aspired to be this, but its repeated failures over many centuries simply added another creative tension to the Christian civilization, this one being between priests and princes (at the highest level between the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic papacy), which would eventually mature into the distinctively Western tension between church and state.

Then, after a millennium of widely and deeply dispersed power centers and of myriad tensions which attended this dispersal, Latin Christendom during the Reformation split into two religions—Catholicism and Protestantism, with the latter in turn splitting into many denominations. This splitting of Latin Christendom into different religions accelerated and accentuated the splitting of the civilization into many states and eventually—after the Wars of Religion, which culminated in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)—the development of the concept of a balance of power between these states. All of this splitting, and also what there was of any balancing, resulted in even more tensions being incorporated into what remained of the Christian civilization. But, because of this extensive and dynamic ensemble of tensions, this civilization was now on the verge of another great transformation, one that would eventually prove to be as fundamental as the great transformations of the Axial Age. Indeed, as we shall argue, this new great transformation would go far to reverse the epic achievements of the Axial Age.

VIII. *The Modern Civilization versus the Axial Age Civilizations*

Eisenstadt and others termed our contemporary global society the modern civilization. This modern civilization began with the scientific and technological revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g., Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, and Newton) and the "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century. This Enlightenment (which in many ways lives on today, especially in the United States and Europe), consciously sought and still seeks to *reverse* the major innovations and great transformations of the Axial Age; that is, it seeks a shift of societal focus in at least three fundamental respects: (1) from divine norms back to human needs; (2) from introspective self-reflection back to adaptive rationality and practical intelligence; and, in the Marxist and nationalist versions of the Enlightenment, (3) from personal

freedom back to societal purpose. For example, out of the Enlightenment there issued the Jacobinism of the French Revolution. And out of Jacobinism, there eventually issued both Communism and Fascism, each of which certainly sought to subordinate human freedom to human purpose. In this respect, however, there have been important and consequential differences between the French and Continental version of the Enlightenment and the British and American, or "Anglo-American," version; the latter has always put more emphasis on preserving personal freedom.

The Enlightenment also removed the Christian priesthood from what had been the Christian civilization. In doing so, it removed one of the pillars of that civilization and therefore the basis for one of its previous creative tensions. Moreover, the Enlightenment removed the sacred texts or the Word from the civilization, progressively replacing it with many diverse words (until now in the Information Age, we are flooded by and immersed in an ocean of words). More fundamentally, the Enlightenment also represented a sort of return to the *pre*–Axial Age, indeed, a return to a sort of *paganism*. Seen in this way, the modern civilization was actually a new pagan civilization.

By the 2000s, the modern civilization had progressed to the point that it was more accurately seen as the postmodern civilization. And by then, this new pagan civilization was on a giant, global scale, the goal of the grand project of globalization promoted by the US elites. It is not surprising, therefore, that the remaining remnants of the Axial Age civilizations—China, India, Iranian (Persian) and Shiite Islamists, Sunni Islamists, and even Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians—have rejected and reacted against this postmodern civilization. They are now engaging in new versions of the continually recurring fundamentalist movements which have characterized the Axial Age civilizations, that is, movements against the continually recurring tendencies to "fall away," to become "worldly," and to revert to "the natural man," which have also characterized the Axial Age civilizations. However, these new versions of fundamentalist movements can now also use Jacobin-like methods—i.e., modern-style methods—to achieve their aims. That is, they can combine the fundamentalist religious ideals and ends of the Axial Age civilizations with the modern and post-modern means of the postmodern civilization.

IX. *From Modern Western Civilization to Postmodern Global Civilization*

During the long modern era (which can be roughly dated from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the twentieth century), the modern

civilization self-consciously saw itself as the enlightened successor to Christendom and eventually called itself Western civilization. Western civilization more or less existed from the Enlightenment down to recent decades (i.e., over a period of about two centuries). The Western civilization in turn comprised two successive eras—the European one, which largely corresponded to the nineteenth century, and the American one, which corresponded to much of the twentieth century.

At the end of the twentieth century, the modern Western civilization transformed itself into the postmodern global civilization. This postmodern civilization represents the extension of what was the Western civilization to the furthest regions of the globe, far beyond its original core in Western Europe and its later core in North America. But, because of this vast extension, the global civilization is also a civilization which represents a new set of central ideas and creative (and also destructive) tensions, which have displaced many of the earlier ideas and tensions that characterized the Western civilization. The most important of these new tensions are probably those between postmodern ideas and values and Axial Age ideas and values.

X. *The American Construction of the Postmodern Global Civilization*

America was always a leader of modernity and therefore of any civilization of modernity. Indeed, Samuel Huntington long ago declared that "America was born modern."[8]

Beginning in the 1960s (if not before), the United States began to spread the civilization of modernity beyond the West itself to the rest of the globe. In doing so, it became the principal creator of a new global modern civilization. In the 1960s, a principal vehicle of this spread was American multinational corporations. In the 1970s, the Carter administration added the ideology of universal human rights. The particular definition of these supposedly universal human rights largely corresponded to an updated version of the American Creed. This was soon advanced by both Democratic and Republican administrations. In the 1980s came both the ideology and the reality of the Information Age, which quickly and easily promulgated the ideas of modernity and then postmodernity throughout the globe. And, in the 1990s, all of these elements were gathered up and integrated into the grand US project of globalization and its accompanying religion of global progressivism.

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[8] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), chapter 2.

During this period, the American business, intellectual, academic, and media elites ceased to be Western in their self-identification but instead became global and universal in their ideas and ideals. Their worldview became truly worldwide in its breadth (and also worldly in its depth, or rather in its lack of spiritual depth). By the 1990s, therefore, the United States had become the core state, the civilizational state, for the new global civilization. This global, now postmodern civilization had a particular (and, from the perspective of the Axial Age civilizations or its remaining remnants, a peculiar) core of beliefs, which in effect serves as its religion. This religion, of course, was no longer Christianity but was instead a new version of the Enlightenment, which was actually an anti-Christian and anti–Axial Age religion.

In some respects, the Enlightenment worldview of the global civilization was still like the Anglo-America Enlightenment, which had included an emphasis on free markets and the limited state. In other respects, however, it was like the French and continental Enlightenment, which had included an emphasis on a universalist ideology, military interventions, and Jacobin methods. Even more, however, it was like the French post-Enlightenment, that is, like postmodernism, with its emphasis on deconstructing all traditional (and therefore all Axial Age) ideas and ideals and on promoting relativism, the equal validity of all ideas and ideals. This postmodern ideology was of course reinforced by the great communication advances brought about by the new technologies of the Information Age and the Internet.

XI. *The Axial Age Resistance to the Postmodern Global Civilization*

Of course, it should not be surprising that the remnants of the Axial Age civilizations have reacted against and rejected this American-led postmodern global civilization. As we have seen, these principally consist of China, India, Iranian and Shi'ite Islam, and Sunni Islam (which unlike the others, has no core state). These remnants of the Axial Age civilizations are obviously rather large and substantial. Indeed, they are large and substantial enough for each to be able to convincingly claim it can now offer an alternative vision of what a civilization should be, a vision that is different from the American one.

Thus, in the view of some (especially the business, intellectual, academic, and media elites of America), the United States is the civilizational state of a new and universal civilization—the postmodern global civilization. However, in the view of others (especially the political, religious, and cultural elites of the Axial Age civilizations), the United States is indeed a great

state, but it is not a *civilizational* state. Rather, many of them see it as an *anticivilizational* state, a state without a true civilization, one which is sort of monster, pagan state and which is the adversary of true civilizations, such as themselves.

XII. *Losers and Winners in Globalization*

During the past three decades (roughly corresponding to the period of the full operation of the United States globalization project), several of the great religions have undergone a revival and transformation into political religions, which enables them to better resist globalization and the United States. Especially strong in their resistance have been revivalist Islam and neo-Confucianism (sometimes referred to as "Asian values"). Also resistant have been revivalist Hinduism and Eastern Orthodoxy. These neotraditional versions of the great religions see the globalization led by the United States to be closely connected with secularization and therefore a threat to themselves. These four sources of religious opposition correspond to four large countries or areas. Two of these have been losers in the new global economy, and two have been winners.

1. *Russia and, More Generally, Most Countries with an Eastern Orthodox Religious Tradition*

For a variety of reasons, countries with an Orthodox tradition have been unsuccessful in making the transition from a communist regime to a liberal democracy and market economy able to adapt well to an open society and global economy (e.g., Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia). Conversely, most countries with a Roman Catholic or Protestant tradition have been successful in making this transition. This contrast among ex-communist countries, between the more Western and the more Eastern, between the Roman Catholic or Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox, means that the political and economic developments since the 1990s have revived and reinforced a historic divide, one that corresponds to the great schism between Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity and even to the ancient division between the Latin and the Greek halves of the Roman Empire. Today, in Russia and the other Orthodox countries, there is substantial resentment and resistance directed at the United States and its global project and secular religion.

2. *The Middle East and, More Generally, Most Countries with an Islamic Religious Tradition*

Most countries with an Islamic tradition have also been unsuccessful in establishing a viable liberal democracy and market economy that would enable them to adapt well to an open society and global economy. For those that experienced the heady years from 1973 to 1985, when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) seemed to be a world power, a long decline in oil prices deepened their sense of failure and their alienation from globalization. Here, too, there is widespread resentment and resistance, whose most obvious representatives are militant organizations based upon the Sunni branch of revivalist Islam, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Another source of resentment and resistance is the Islamic Republic of Iran, the representative of the Shi'ite branch of revivalist Islam and the heir to the civilizational state of Persia.

The religious and cultural elites of the Sunni branch of Islam have an unusual problem. There is no clear and obvious core civilizational state for Sunni Islam. (The closest approximations are Turkey and Saudi Arabia.) However, the Sunni elites see themselves and their civilization as being the very opposite of the United States in several important respects: (1) Sunni Islam is a civilization, even a great civilization, but one without a state, whereas the United States is a great state, but one without a civilization; (2) Sunni Islam represents an ideal waiting to become real, a spirit waiting to become flesh (in particular, the restoration of a true Caliphate), whereas the United States represents a mere material and mundane reality, from which the ideal and spiritual have departed; and, as a consequence of (1) and (2), (3) Sunni Islam is today in a condition of both great vulnerability and great promise, whereas the United States is today in a condition of great power but little promise.

The Sunni Islamists seek to bring about the realization of their religious ideal with the use of modern means (e.g., terrorism using modern weapons), by bringing down what they see as their opponent, the anticivilizational state that is the United States. For them, there is a great calling to fulfill, which is to create a great state, the Caliphate, for a great civilization, Islam. We should not be surprised that they judge it permissible, even imperative, to use any means possible against a state that they see as a monster, pagan, anticivilizational state.

Conversely, there is growing opposition to the United States even from some of the winners in the global economy. These include:

1. *China and, More Generally, Most Countries with a Confucian Tradition*

Most Chinese, both in China itself and among the "overseas Chinese," see their economic success as resulting from their own culture or "Asian values," from engaging in the global economy in their own way. This conception was reinforced by their interpretation of the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s. The countries with the most open currency markets (South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia) suffered the greatest disruptions and declines. Those whose currency markets were most regulated (China and, ironically, Taiwan) experienced little disruption and continued their economic growth. And in the 2000s and 2010s, the East Asian countries, or those with a Confucian tradition, continued to enjoy great, even spectacular, economic success.

2. *India*

The entry of India into the global economy has been recent, and its benefits have been unevenly distributed. It has occurred, however, at the same time as the growth of Hindu nationalism, the development of Indian nuclear weapons, and increased confidence in rejecting certain Western ways.

The external sources of opposition to globalization led by the United States are thus very disparate. But together these sources of opposition comprise a vast region, really all of Eurasia and more, which stretches from Russia and Eastern Europe, through the Middle East, through South Asia, to China and East Asia. In this vast region are found the four great civilizations that Huntington identified as most likely to oppose the West in "the clash of civilizations." These are, in his terms, "Slavic-Orthodox," Islamic, Hindu, and "Sinic-Confucian" civilizations. In this region, too, are four nuclear powers—Russia, Pakistan, India, and China, each of them seeing themselves as the center of their civilization. Singly or collectively, they have now developed the capacity and the will to disrupt and contain the American way of globalization.

XIII. *Creation, Revival, and Secularization*

The birth of a new religion is an awesome event. The spiritual world enters into the material one and releases enormous energy. It is, in a way, analogous to the biblical story of the creation itself. It is also analogous to the scientific formula for the conversion of energy into mass, $E=mc^2$. This release of enormous energy was what happened with the creation of Christianity and its later revival in Protestantism. However, something with the appearance of this process also happened with the creation of such religions as Buddhism,

Islam, and Mormonism. Each of these very different new religions then created a new authority, with new laws and new forms of obedience (the original meaning of *religious* means *binding*). It also created a new communion, and therefore community, of believers. These new forms of authority and community became a new form of society.

For the next generation of believers and for succeeding ones, therefore, there were available more-developed material and external forms of the religion than for the first generation, but less-immediate spiritual and inner experiences. In regard to the religious authority, there was, in the words of Max Weber, the "routinization of charisma." In regard to the religious community, there was the ritualization of communion. In the words of the German theologian and Weber's contemporary Ernst Troeltsch, the sect became a church. Eventually, the religious community may calcify into being merely an ethnic community.

On occasion, however, the religious community experiences a revival, a moment when once again the spiritual world enters into the material one, when the routinized and ritualized forms of religious authority and community are revived and reformed. This happened most dramatically with the Protestant Reformation. It also happened, as a sort of reflection of the Protestant Reformation, with the Catholic Counter-Reformation. But religious communities have continued to experience revivals right down to the present time (e.g., Evangelical Protestantism, revivalist Islam, and revivalist Hinduism).

On the other hand, the process of routinization may continue until it reaches the point of secularization. The spiritual seems to have completely departed, and only the material seems to remain. However, the image of the spiritual remains in successive, but fainter, versions of social values and practices (rather like successive and fainter photocopies of an original text). These include conceptions of secular authority and community and also ideas about politics and economics. This prolonged process of routinization and secularization can be termed the declension of a religion. It clearly has characterized many versions of Christianity. But it also has characterized versions of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism.

XIV. *Varieties of Secularization*

Even where secularization has occurred, the result has not been one common, secular philosophy but rather a variety of different secularizations. Each religion has secularized in its own distinctive way, which has resulted in its own distinctive secular outcome. This suggests that even if globalization

brings about more secularization, it will not soon bring about one common, global worldview. We shall review the different secularizations that have characterized the modern world, beginning with the most pronounced secularization of all, that of Protestant Christianity.

The Protestant Reformation originated in Northern Europe. It quickly split, however, into two main branches, which were Lutheranism and Calvinism or the Reformed religion. (Examples of the Reformed churches were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and a wide variety of "dissenting" churches.) Lutheranism came to dominate Northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries; the Reformed churches came to dominate the Netherlands, Scotland, and the United States and to be prominent in England.

1. *Secularized Reformed Religion*

The Reformed version of Protestantism, more than any other major religion, emphasizes the individual believer's direct relationship with God. It has no place for intermediaries between the believer and God and therefore no place for a religious hierarchy. It also has no need for communal rituals to achieve salvation and therefore little need for a religious community. This rejection of religious hierarchy and community has had momentous consequences for the way that peoples with a Reformed tradition have dealt with the secular realms of economics and politics. The rejection of religious hierarchy and community gave rise to a rejection of secular hierarchies and communities as well. In brief, Reformed theology gave rise to liberal ideology.

In the realm of economics, Reformed peoples (as in Britain and the United States) have been especially inclined toward the ideas of capitalism and the free market: Weber famously analyzed this connection in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904). In the realm of politics, Reformed peoples have been especially inclined to the ideas of liberalism and democracy, particularly liberal democracy. De Tocqueville famously analyzed this connection in his *Democracy in America* (1845). In our time, all of this makes secularized once-Reformed peoples especially amenable to globalization.

2. *Secularized Lutheranism*

Lutheranism was the other main branch of Protestantism, and it protested against the Roman Catholic hierarchy which culminated with the pope in Rome. It also protested against the idea that salvation could be achieved through good works within the religious community. Unlike the Reformed churches, however, Lutheranism retained a religious hierarchy at the national level, which culminated in state churches led by a secular monarch. It also

retained some sense that the religious community was useful for a variety of religious purposes.

This attenuation but not rejection of religious hierarchy and community meant that Lutheranism gave rise to its own distinctive way of dealing with the secular issues of economics and politics. In the realm of economics, Lutheran peoples (as in Northern Germany and Scandinavia) have been especially inclined to the idea of state regulation and planning. In the realm of politics, they have been especially inclined to the ideas of social democracy. And Lutheran peoples too have been very amenable to globalization.

3. *Secularized Roman Catholicism*

The Protestant Reformation did not succeed in converting Southern Europe and much of Central Europe. Rather, the Catholic Counter-Reformation succeeded in establishing a revitalized Roman Catholic Church in these regions, complete with a highly articulated theology of papal hierarchy and parish community, forming a truly universal (the original meaning of *catholic*) church.

This accentuation of religious hierarchy, community, and universality meant that Roman Catholicism gave rise to a distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of economics and politics, even if this led through the peculiar path of anti-Catholicism. In economics, secularized Catholic peoples (as in France, Italy, Spain, and much of the Habsburg monarchy) were especially inclined toward Marxist ideology. Its universal conceptions naturally appealed to secularized Catholics. In politics, they were especially inclined toward socialist (but not necessarily communist) parties. Their highly structured organizations, emphasizing both hierarchy and community, also naturally appealed to secularized Catholics. And in our time, secularized Roman Catholic peoples have been less accepting of globalization than secularized Protestant ones, and less successful operating within it.

4. *Secularized Eastern Orthodoxy*

The various Eastern Orthodox churches (Eastern Europe and Russia) have had yet another conception and configuration of religious hierarchy and religious community. Like Lutheran Protestantism but more so, they have emphasized a national religious hierarchy, culminating in a state church. Like Roman Catholicism but even more so, they have emphasized the local religious community, with intense communal bonds.

This accentuation of religious hierarchy, community, and nationality meant that Eastern Orthodoxy gave rise to a distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of politics and economics (including the primacy of politics

over economics). In politics, secularized Orthodox peoples have been especially inclined toward varieties of communalism and populism. When dealing with wider social issues, some communalists and populists have turned toward ethnic nationalism. Others have turned toward communism.

These political attitudes, in turn, have had distinct consequences for economic behavior. They have generally inhibited the development of individual economic initiative. It is no accident that Eastern Orthodox peoples, even secularized ones, are relatively underdeveloped in regard to economic entrepreneurship. Indeed, in Eastern Orthodox countries, the entrepreneurs were normally found among the Jewish or Protestant religious minorities. This close correlation between ethnic identity and economic proficiency, and the resulting sharp contrast between the poor ethnic majority and the rich ethnic minority, have reinforced the communalist and populist politics of Eastern Orthodox peoples. All of this has made secularized Orthodox peoples quite resentful and resistant toward globalization.

5. *Secularized Judaism*

Historically, of course, Jews were always a minority within the European countries in which they resided. Perhaps this explains why secularized Jews have been inclined to a rather wide variety of different ideologies, often corresponding to the dominant ideology of the secularized Christians around them. It seems, however, that the commitment of secularized Jews to any particular ideology has often been more intense and extreme than that of the secularized Christians.

Thus, in Western Europe and the United States, secularized Jews have been especially inclined toward liberalism and indeed have been among its most consistent advocates. In Central Europe, secularized Jews were especially inclined toward Marxism and were among the most consistent advocates of it. In Eastern Europe and Russia, many secularized Jews were especially inclined toward Zionism, which can be seen as being strongly communalist, populist, and ethnic nationalist. Others, of course, were especially inclined toward communism and indeed were among its most consistent advocates (until Joseph Stalin, in the last years of his rule, turned against communist Jews).

6. *Secularized Confucianism*

Given the importance of China in leading the great-power resistance to the American way of modernization and globalization, we shall also say something about its own peculiar version of secularization, which has been secularization with Chinese characteristics. Confucianism is not quite a religion

in the sense of the others that we have discussed. It lacks a highly articulated conception of the spiritual world, that is, a theology. It does, however, have one of the most highly articulated conceptions of what hierarchy and community should be in the temporal world, that is, something like an ideology.

Like almost all other religions, Confucianism has emphasized both hierarchy and community. In these respects, it probably has been most similar to Roman Catholicism. In addition, however, it also has emphasized individual achievements within strict hierarchical and communal norms, that is, through the learning of the Confucian texts demonstrated in written examinations ("texts and tests," or TNT), leading to advancement in the state bureaucracy, and through economic effort and initiative that benefitted the local community as well as the individual. In these last respects, Confucianism has been curiously similar to Judaism, which emphasized the learning of the Torah and the Talmud and also emphasized economic entrepreneurship.

This accentuation of hierarchy, community, and constrained individual achievement has meant that Confucianism has given rise to its own distinctive way of dealing with the secular realms of politics and economics. In politics, Confucian peoples have been especially inclined toward state authoritarianism. In economics, they have been especially inclined toward state-guided capitalism.

Most peoples adhering to the other major religions (Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists) have not undergone a process of secularization to anywhere near the degree of what has occurred in Europe and the Americas (among Christians and Jews) and in East Asia (among Confucians). If and when the peoples of these religions become secularized on a large scale, however, they will retain their own distinctive conceptions and configurations of hierarchy and community. These, in turn, will have implications for their patterns of authority, the family, and the individual. And these patterns are likely to make them feel that American-style globalization is alien to them and their identity.

XV. *Varieties of Globalization*

Thus, the American way of globalization has now provoked a new kind of globalization, that is, a resistance to globalization which is itself on a global scale. That resistance is composed of many peoples who have been the losers from globalization, even in the West itself. But the core of this resistance is found in the heirs to the great non-Western religions, especially Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Even in their

secularized versions, they represent ways to modernization greatly different from the American and Western way. Indeed, at least two of these religions—Islam and Confucianism—have each given its heirs a vision of globalism created in its own image. Although very different from each other, Islamism and China now each proclaim their own way to globalization—that is, either to a globalization in submission to Islam or to a globalization with Chinese characteristics. Thus, as we go further into the twenty-first century, and further into the era of globalization, we find that globalization has reached such a high degree of development that there is not just one but many globalizations. We seem to be approaching a world-historical clash of globalizations.

Conclusion

The new American religion of global progressivism is a religion of the elites, by the elites, and for the elites. It is a religion without God, or rather its god is merely human elites, that is, itself. Since it does not have a spiritual god, a *theos*, this religion does not have a theology, but merely an ideology.

Although global progressivism claims to advance the people through its program of social justice, in practice it sets different groups of the people—especially different racial and gender groups—against other groups. That is, it is really a new version of the classic elite strategy of divide and rule. Therefore, it does not produce a public, but rather it destroys the public. Since global progressivism has neither a public nor a theology, it cannot provide a public theology, but merely an elite ideology.

In this election year of 2020, this new American religion is intent upon achieving complete hegemony within the United States and over the American people. If it should do so, it will redouble its efforts to eliminate all traditional and neotraditional religions, both at home and abroad. But this will in turn drive these religions toward greater resistance to what they rightly see as a monster, pagan religion.

In the end, the upward and outward progress of global progressivism will culminate in a great storm and a great fall. Then, in the ruins of both the old American republic and the new American religion which destroyed it, will be found a remnant, a remnant of the original American religion of Reform Protestantism. Out of this remnant there will then come a new public theology. But this new public theology will look very much like the oldest public theology of all, that given to the ancient Israelites in the Bible. For such has been, is now, and ever shall be the enduring basis for a public theology of a people in covenant with God.

Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Public Theology

BENYAMIN F. INTAN

Abstract

In 1974, Martin Marty first introduced the term *public theology*, and it has since gained popularity. However, the reality of public theology has long been a part of the church's witness and should continue to be one of the church's essential tasks. John Calvin's view of public theology has impacted modern politics, both on the democratic movement and the development of Western law and human rights. Not a few have accused him of inhibiting freedom and democratic ideals. Here, I will discuss Calvin's political thought and also identify a few themes that were later developed by his followers, especially the neo-Calvinist movement initiated by Abraham Kuyper, and which provide foundational concepts for building a pluralistic and tolerant democratic society.

Keywords

Public Theology, neo-Calvinism, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Church-state relationship, sphere sovereignty

Introduction

In 1974, when distinguishing his theological ideas from Robert Bellah's understanding of civil religion, Martin Marty, a Protestant church historian from Chicago Divinity School, coined the terms *public theologian* and *public theology*.[1] Since then public theology has been a popular topic, becoming one of the most important in Christian theology and ethics.[2] However, while it is discussed openly in all religious traditions,[3] it is primarily associated with Christianity.[4]

The purpose of public theology is, as John Bolt has defined it, "to provide a theological framework within which Christian citizens can conscientiously fashion their political vocation and interpret, evaluate, and transform the civic communities of which they are members."[5] It attempts to think about various public issues from a theological perspective. Bolt's definition suggests three kinds of approaches that public theology could take. The first approach is apologetic in nature. As Max Stackhouse observes, by allowing Christians to encounter different faiths in public life and engage with them, the apologetic approach of public theology tries to maintain a friendly relationship with non-Christians who may have different and even opposing worldviews.[6] Secondly, as public theology in Bolt's definition aims to transform and change society, it also has a confessional nature in that it focuses on the promotion of distinctive Christian values and commitments in its attempts

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[1] The term *public theologian* first appeared in Martin E. Marty, "Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion," in *American Civil Religion*, ed. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 139–57, whereas the term *public theology* was first used in Martin E. Marty, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Public Theology and the American Experience," *Journal of Religion* 54.4 (1974): 332–59.

[2] See, for example, Sebastian Kim and Katie Day, eds., *A Companion to Public Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[3] See, for example, Richard C. Martin, "Public Aspects of Theology in Medieval Islam: The Role of *Kalam* in Conflict Definition and Resolution," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 13 (1993): 77–100; Alan Mittleman, ed., *Religion as a Public Good: Jews and Other Americans on Religion in the Public Square* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

[4] Robert W. McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 185, n. 12.

[5] John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 224.

[6] See Max Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), viii–xiv, 17–35. A number of authors have taken the apologetic approach in spite of having differing views on certain issues. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Robert Benne, *Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); and Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

to change the social-political structure of society. Ronald Thiemann is one among those who defended this confessional approach.[7] The third approach underscores Bolt's emphasis on the importance of political ideas for public theology, especially when it has to deal with public elements such as religious pluralism, academics, politics, and economics.[8]

Within this framework, this article will discuss John Calvin's idea of public theology, which has had a tremendous impact on many areas of life. In line with Bolt, we will address Calvin's political thought and argue that his public theology is both apologetic and confessional. However, scholars have also noted that while Calvin's political ideas have become a catalyst for modern political thought[9] in the way they influence modern theories of law and government[10] and develop modern democracy and human rights,[11] they have also been accused of inhibiting freedom and democratic ideals.[12] This tension has subsequently given rise to the image of "two Calvins." His followers later identified other tensions within Calvin's political ideas and developed certain themes related to those tensions. One such theme is the political thought of the neo-Calvinist movement—a movement chiefly associated with the great Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper corrected and further developed Calvin's political ideas of public life. In this article, I shall also argue that the adoption of a

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[7] See Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991). A number of confessional theologians, although maintaining different views on some aspects of the approach, share certain core similarities with it. See William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); and John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

[8] Max L. Stackhouse, introduction to *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1999), xxvii–xxviii.

[9] See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[10] See John T. McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 260–74; John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Douglas F. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on Five Governments from the 16th Through 18th Centuries* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992).

[11] See John T. McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," *Church History* 18.3 (September 1949): 153–71; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Democracy: Some Political Implications of Debates on French Reformed Church Government, 1562–1572," *American Historical Review* 69 (1964): 393–401.

[12] See Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (London: Lutterworth, 1953).

neo-Calvinist thinking of public theology will provide a significant contribution to the establishment of a pluralistic and tolerant society.

I. *Calvin's Views*

1. *Calvin's Concept of Public Theology*

As Calvin's idea of public theology is rooted in the sovereignty of God, it claims that only the Triune God is sovereign over all of life. Calvin teaches that each person is by nature *homo religioso*—incurably religious. He therefore calls the human heart a "factory of idols" (Rom. 1:25),[13] indicating that a religiously neutral ground simply does not exist. Calvin insists that Christians, in recognition of this, must enter the various arenas of public life and transform secular society. In his 1951 classic *Christ and Culture*, Richard Niebuhr argues that the Christ as "the Transformer of Culture" position is most clearly presented in the work of Calvin.[14] Taking religious reform seriously, Calvin is deeply concerned by the need to reform the secular realm. "We must not only grieve for the offences committed by unbelievers," Calvin points out, "but also recognize that we remain unworthy to look upon heaven until there is harmony and unanimity in religion, till God is purely worshipped by all, and all the world is reformed."[15] He further adds that only "by practicing justice towards each other" can Christians "prove that their service of God is sincere."[16]

For Christians to transform society, they must first of all engage with other religious values. It seems that an apologetic approach to public theology fits well with Calvin, as Stackhouse argues:

> That which we as Christians believe we have to offer the world for its salvation is not esoteric, privileged, irrational, or inaccessible. It is something that we believe to be both comprehensible and indispensable for all, something that we can reasonably discuss with Hindus and Buddhists, Jews and Muslims, Humanists and Marxists. Second, such a theology will give guidance to the structures and policies of public life. It is ethical in nature. The truth for which we argue must imply a viable element of justice, and its adequacy can be tested on that basis.[17]

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[13] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2006), 1.11.8.

[14] See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 190–229.

[15] John Calvin, *Sermon No. 30 on Deuteronomy*, 238, quoted in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 192.

[16] John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 12:7.

[17] Stackhouse, *Public Theology*, xi.

Calvin observes that the transformation of society reveals the Christian's necessary responsibility. This transformation necessitates a confessional approach to public theology, which Thiemann proposes in his definition of public theology as "faith seeking to understand the relation between Christian convictions and the broader social and cultural contexts within which the Christian community lives."[18]

Any proper analysis of Calvin's political thought unsurprisingly leads to the conclusion that the correct relationship between church and state became a major concern for him. The issue of church-state relationship was, as David Little has put it, "as old as the Christian church itself and in an important sense had been at the heart of Christian cogitation, in its diverse forms, from the beginning of Christianity."[19] His foundational ideas of the church-state relationship are found in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and in the biblical commentaries.

2. *Church-State Relationship and Liberty*

Calvin's view on church and state cannot be separated from his doctrine of the two kingdoms. While Calvin took up Martin Luther's two-kingdoms approach in many important ways, he developed it in a different direction.[20] He did not agree with the way Luther defined the relationship between church and state. Following Luther, he believed that God established two kingdoms with a distinct purpose for each.

> There is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the "spiritual" and the "temporal" jurisdiction … by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life …. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom.[21]

The distinction between the two kingdoms must be constantly kept in mind. Calvin was concerned about those who "unwisely mingle these two, which have a completely different nature."[22] How distinct they are is evident

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[18] Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, 21.

[19] David Little, "Reformed Faith and Religious Liberty," *Church and Society* 76.5 (May–June 1986): 6.

[20] Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 44.

[21] Calvin, *Institutes* 3.19.15.

[22] Ibid., 4.20.1.

from the fact that when people think about one kingdom, they "must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other."[23]

What does Calvin's view of the church-state relationship look like? Emidio Campi, a distinguished Reformation church historian, has described Calvin's view of the church-state relationship as follows:

> In the *Institutes*, book IV, chapter 20, Calvin clearly elucidates his views [on the relationship of the Church and the civil magistrates], which were in marked contrast with a number of other positions. As is well known, he firmly rejected the papal hierocracy of the late Middle Ages. He was equally opposed to the Erastian subordination of the Church to the political authority, be it in Lutheran or Zwinglian fashion. Although he refused, like the Anabaptists, any confusion between the spiritual and the temporal orders, he did not hold with them that Christians ought to remain apart from all magisterial offices. Magistrates are a gift of God for the benefit of the human race and therefore to despise them is to despise the providence which set them in place.[24]

Campi rightly notes that based on his two-kingdoms theory, Calvin rejects the doctrine of papal supremacy advocated by the Roman church, which subordinates the state's authority to the church's control. It is understood that the pope, who claims to be Christ's deputy, possesses supreme jurisdiction in all ecclesiastical matters since "Christ's kingdom is not of this world." But by claiming supreme power over civil power, Calvin argues, the pope "rules barbarously and tyrannically."[25] He further indicates that by confusing its ministry of Christ's spiritual government and the magisterial political claims, the Roman church disclosed its obsession with "secular power" and "lust for dominion."[26] Clerics were more interested in exercising political power than in fulfilling their spiritual functions as ministers of Christ. Consequently, electing a bishop, "they choose a lawyer who knows how to plead in a court rather than how to preach in a church."[27] The Roman church, according to Calvin, is corrupt since it neglects its fundamental ministry of the Word.[28] The problem was "not simply the politicization of ecclesiastical authority," as Matthew Tuininga has put it, "but the exercise of magisterial power over religion, as if Christ has placed his authority at the discretion of the church."[29]

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[23] Ibid., 3.19.15.

[24] Emidio Campi, *Shifting Patterns of Reformed Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 65–66.

[25] John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 60:10.

[26] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.11.14.

[27] Ibid., 4.5.1.

[28] Ibid., 4.2.10.

[29] Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church:*

Campi is also correct in noting that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine led him to refuse *Caesaropapism*—"[a] system whereby supreme authority over the church is exercised by a secular ruler, so even doctrine is subject to state control."[30] As noted above, civil government is responsible for establishing peace and public justice, both of which remain outward, temporal, and limited to this life. Otherwise, "the civil and earthly government cannot be distinguished from the spiritual kingdom of Christ."[31] Moreover, by maintaining the authority and independence of the church, Calvin argued against *Erastianism*—a form of Caesaropapism—that occurred in England in 1534 when King Henry VIII, by ending the pope's influence, declared himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England.[32] Calvin compared Henry to the apostate Israelite King Jehu, who enthusiastically obeyed the call of a prophet to overthrow the dynasty of Ahab but continued to hold on to the idolatrous worship of King Jeroboam. Calvin concludes that "the reformation under Jehu was like that under Henry," in which Henry "pretended great zeal for a time: he afterwards raged cruelly against all the godly and doubled (*duplicavit*—duplicated) the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff."[33]

By the rejection of both papal supremacy and Caesaropapism, a "community of freedom" between church and state could be attained.[34] Stackhouse rightly notes that human freedom, which is "a gift of God" and "the mark of being genuinely human,"[35] is a significant key theme for the apologetic approach of public theology. This approach requires an engagement of different values and religious backgrounds in the public sphere. But how can the different religious beliefs engage properly with one another without each being freed from the bondage of religious and political powers?

Christ's Two Kingdoms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 188.

[30] J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 173. The authority exercised by the Byzantine (East Roman) Emperors over the Eastern Church, especially in the centuries immediately preceding the Schism of 1054, is the best way to illustrate Caesaropapism. F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 264.

[31] John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 12:10.

[32] Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 2, *Reformation to the Present, A.D. 1500–A.D. 1975* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 801–2.

[33] John Calvin, *Commentary on Hosea* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:3–4.

[34] See David Hollenbach, "Afterword: A Community of Freedom," in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 323–43.

[35] Stackhouse, *Public Theology*, 29–30.

The idea of freedom is essential for Calvin's public theology. Calvin views freedom as coming from God and thus "an inestimable boon"[36]—something that is worth "more than half of life."[37] Calvin distinguishes spiritual freedom from political freedom. While God has ordained spiritual freedom to balance the spiritual law of the church, God has bestowed political freedom to balance the law of the state.[38] Calvin would not tolerate any abuse of either spiritual or political freedom by any government, whether in the form of papal supremacy or of Caesaropapism. When governments abuse God-given freedom, they no longer hold the office of authority described in Romans 13 but are mere "brigands" and "criminals."[39] Such governments, having risen against God, must be put down through "lesser magistrates."[40]

While arguing that church and state should be kept distinct, Calvin also stresses that they "are not at variance."[41] He observes in Romans 13 how Paul describes government as "an ordinance of God" and princes as "ministers of God." Civil government is not only a "holy and lawful" vocation but also "the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men."[42] While Calvin does not include civil government as part of Christ's spiritual kingdom, he considers it to be under the lordship of Christ.[43] Therefore the two kingdoms are not what the Anabaptists view as "antithetical" and irreconcilable.[44] Calvin considers the Anabaptists' rejection of Christians' participation in civil government as overthrowing the political order. It indicates their failure to appreciate civil government as a gift of God's providence essential to human life since it establishes "civil justice and outward morality."[45]

As both kingdoms are under Christ and must serve his purposes, Calvin advocates for "their mutual interaction."[46] Whereas Little employs the term "disassociate and interconnect" to describe the relation between church and state in Calvin's thought,[47] Stanford Reid summarizes Calvin's political

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[36] *Calvin Opera* 29:544, quoted in Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, 158.

[37] *Calvin Opera* 24:627, quoted in McNeill, "The Democratic Element in Calvin's Thought," 166.

[38] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.1.

[39] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 50–51.

[40] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.31.

[41] Ibid., 4.20.2.

[42] Ibid., 4.20.4.

[43] See Gordon J. Keddie, "Calvin on Civil Government," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32 (1981): 23–35.

[44] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.2.

[45] Ibid., 4.20.1.

[46] John T. McNeill, "John Calvin on Civil Government," in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 41.

[47] Little, "Reformed Faith," 9.

thought as "that of mutual independence, but also of mutual helpfulness and support."[48] Campi also underscores Calvin's view on the church-state relationship as "not the separation of the spiritual and temporal powers but rather their mutual aid and reciprocal collaboration, each being free in its own sphere."[49]

On the other hand, church and state—although separate from each other—are responsible to each other. With regard to the church's responsibility to the state, Calvin argues that Christians have to take their faith and distinctive values directly into public life "as ambassadors and stewards of the treasure of salvation, of the covenant of God … of the secrets of God."[50] Such a role of religion in public life, according to Thiemann, is a key characteristic of the confessional approach of public theology. For him, "questions of conviction, value, and faith" should become a part of "public discourse."[51] John Witte points out Calvin's emphasis that in so doing, Christians "not only allow God's glory and image to shine" in society but also "induce unbelievers in society to seek God's grace."[52]

In sum, Calvin's view on church-state relationship not only frees the church from the bondage of social-political powers such as the state but also encourages it to carry out its role in the public domain. Note that in addition to "liberties" or "freedoms" (*libertates*, *libertés*), Calvin also speaks about "rights" (*iura*, *droits*). Witte notes Calvin's occasional use of such general phrases as "the common rights of mankind" *(iura commune hominum*), the "natural rights" (*iura naturali*) of persons, the "rights of a common nature" (*communis naturae iura*), and "the equal rights and liberties" (*pari iura et libertates*) of all.[53]

Calvin's idea of rights has been developed by his successor Theodore Beza and later by others such as Johannes Althusius, John Milton, and in Puritan New England. Before the Enlightenment, Calvinists argued for natural rights, especially natural religious rights such as freedom of belief, practice, and conscience.[54]

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[48] W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin and the Political Order," in *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet*, ed. Jacob. T. Hoogstra (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 252.

[49] Emidio Campi, "Calvin's Understanding of the Church and Its Relevance for the Ecumenical Movement," Kirchenbund, https://www.kirchenbund.ch/en/topics/calvin-s-understanding-church-and-its-relevance-ecumenical-movement#fussnote_39.

[50] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 61.

[51] Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, 40.

[52] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 61.

[53] Ibid., 57.

[54] See ibid.

Therefore, numerous scholars have noted Calvin's ties to the development of liberty and human rights. Charles Borgeaud, for example, has considered Calvin to be "the first stronghold of liberty in modern times."[55] Robert Knudsen describes Calvin as "the patron of modern human rights. In his thought he anticipated the modern republican form of government. … Calvin stood against the abuses of power in his time and wrestled with the problem of the right to revolt."[56] "Every competent historian," as Kuyper put it, "will without exception confirm the words of [the American historian George] Bancroft: 'The fanatic for Calvinism was a fanatic for liberty, for in the moral warfare for freedom, his creed was a part of his army, and his most faithful ally in the battle.'"[57]

3. *Constantinian Influence and Intolerance*

With regard to the state's responsibility to the church, Calvin argues that government is the guardian of both tables of the Decalogue.[58] Along with maintaining the peace and public decency of the Second Table, civil government is ordained to promote "true religion" of the First Table. As far as the First Table is concerned, one primary task of the government is to prevent "idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion."[59] As Campi put it,

> The civil authority is endowed with God's authority and acts as his representative. Calvin emphasizes that its primary functions are not solely preventative and deterrent. In fulfilling their divinely ordained task in the civil kingdom, the magistrates are called to work in the service of the spiritual kingdom.[60]

For this reason, magistrates have among their chief tasks "to cherish and protect the outward worship of God" and "to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church."[61] Hence "a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians."[62]

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[55] As quoted in John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 196.

[56] Robert D. Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Modern World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 13.

[57] Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 78, quoting George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America*, 15th ed. (New York, 1853), 1:319.

[58] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.9.

[59] Ibid., 4.20.3.

[60] Campi, *Shifting Patterns*, 62.

[61] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.2.

[62] Ibid., 4.20.3.

It is therefore unfair to charge Calvin with Constantinian thinking. "The *Constantinian* model," according to John Hiemstra, "sees the rule of God occur through *Christian* political authorities who are revelatory of God's will and thereby have the right to govern over and above the church and society and impose Christian beliefs."[63] Even though the magistrates' civil jurisdiction is over religious and moral matters they are not, according to Calvin, "to make laws according to their own decision concerning religion and the worship of God." Their duty does not include "rightly establishing religion."[64] Witte observes that this view of Calvin is "[in] contrast to both Lutherans and Anglicans, who at that time vested in the magistrate the power to promulgate all manner of civil laws respecting religious worship, liturgies, prayers, and other cultic activities. Calvin countenanced no such legal religious establishment."[65]

Nevertheless, by allowing magistrates to promulgate laws against idolatry, a Constantinian influence, or "a key negative Constantinian element,"[66] exists in Calvin's thought. The religious coercion of government, according to Hiemstra, will inevitably "raise the spectre of oppression, persecution and intolerance of minority and dissenting faiths."[67] Thus, considering the unique context of time and place, Calvin's support for the magistrates' execution of Servetus, which has been called "one of the most famous controversies of modern times about religious freedom," is not surprising.[68]

Calvin's position reappears in the Belgic Confession (1561)—a doctrinal standard of the Reformed faith. Drafted by Guido de Brès, a student of Calvin, the initial text of the Confession was influenced by the Gallic Confession (1559), which was largely written by Calvin.[69] Article 36 duplicates Calvin's Constantinian influence:

> And [the magistrates'] office is, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also that *they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of anti-Christ may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted. They must therefore countenance*

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[63] John L. Hiemstra, "A Calvinist Case for Tolerant Public Pluralism: The Religious Sources of Abraham Kuyper's Public Philosophy," *Religious Studies and Theology* 34.1 (2015): 61.

[64] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.3.

[65] Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 65.

[66] Hiemstra, "A Calvinist Case," 62.

[67] Ibid., 63.

[68] Josef Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation* (London, 1960), 1:325 as quoted in Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 65.

[69] D. G. Hart, "Implausible: Calvinism and American Politics," in *John Calvin's American Legacy*, ed. Thomas J. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77.

> *the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by everyone*, as he commands in his Word.[70]

While captive in a Dutch/Belgian prison in 1561, de Brès drafted this Confession with the purpose, among other things, of showing the Catholic Spanish King Philip II, who was persecuting Reformed Christians, that "he and the Reformed churches in fact did adhere to true Christian faith." Hiemstra explains further,

> They were neither rebellious, nor law breakers, nor heretics, so the King had no grounds to persecute them. Ironically, de Brès does not question whether political authorities ought to have a duty to coercively advance "true" religion or, conversely, to oppress "false" religions …. De Brès assumed the correctness of this political task, as did all Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and fellow Calvinist leaders of his time.[71]

For this reason, numerous scholars criticize Calvin and describe him as intolerant and inhibiting freedom. Ernst Troeltsch pictures him as "notoriously rigid" and his views as "as undemocratic and authoritarian as possible."[72] Roland Bainton calls Calvin "the arch-inquisitor of Protestantism" and "dictator of Geneva."[73] "If Calvin ever wrote anything in favor of religious liberty," writes Bainton, "it was a typographical error."[74]

Hence the concept of "two Calvins." In his portrayal of Calvin, William Bouwsma concludes that there were really "two Calvins, coexisting uncomfortably within the same historical personage."[75] One Calvin was "a philosopher, a rationalist and a schoolman in the high Scholastic tradition," "a man of fixed principles, and a conservative." This "philosophical Calvin" favored a "static orthodoxy" and "craved desperately for intelligibility, order, certainty. Distrusting freedom, he struggled to control both himself and the world." The other Calvin was "a rhetorician and humanist," who tolerated individual liberty and was "flexible." This was a Calvin who "was inclined to celebrate the paradoxes and mystery at the heart of existence."[76] This two-sidedness of Calvin's persona has given birth to different traditions within Calvinism, where each could appeal directly and with warrant to Calvin himself.

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[70] Henry Beets, *The Reformed Confession Explained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929), 266 (emphasis added).

[71] Hiemstra, "A Calvinist Case," 63.

[72] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Churches* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), 2:628.

[73] Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, 53, quoted in Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 40.

[74] Roland H. Bainton, *Concerning Heretics … An Anonymous Work Attributed to Sebastian Castello* (New York: Octagon Books, 1935), 74, quoted in Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, 40.

[75] Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 230.

[76] Ibid., 230–31.

Next, I will discuss the political ideas of neo-Calvinism that corrected and developed Calvin's concept of public theology and see how they establish a pluralistic and tolerant society.

II. *The Neo-Calvinist Tradition*

Kuyper and his followers agreed to call themselves neo-Calvinists since they viewed themselves as developing historic Calvinism to counter the surrounding culture.[77] One of the most significant contributions of neo-Calvinism to public theology is its vision of pluralism. In the Netherlands, since the late nineteenth century, the neo-Calvinist tradition has argued for a pluralistic and tolerant society,[78] and during the past four decades Kuyper's concept of pluralism has been acknowledged as a distinctive Reformed contribution to culture and government. Rooted in Calvin's political thought, neo-Calvinism's idea of public theology claims that only the Triune God is sovereign over all of life.[79] This means that all of life is religious. Kuyper formulated this insight in his famous adage that "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry, 'Mine'"[80] After examining Kuyper's theological and political ideas, Vincent Bacote concludes that his public theology is both apologetic and confessional.[81]

1. *Sphere Sovereignty*

Based on God's sovereignty, neo-Calvinism holds that God has created the world with various structures and institutions that operate within different spheres of social life. Each of these spheres—the family, the church, the school, the civil government, the marketplace—has its own God-given task, and God commands human beings to serve as officeholders in these various spheres of life. This pluralism, which Kuyper called *sphere sovereignty*, teaches that not a single sphere can properly usurp the power or the

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[77] Albert Wolters, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 117.

[78] James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 131.

[79] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 79.

[80] James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461.

[81] See Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

functions of another.[82] Sphere sovereignty is normative, since each sphere is an "ordinance of God" and a part of the original created order.[83]

Regarding the church-state relationship, sphere sovereignty proposes "a community of freedom" between church and state.[84] Kuyper called it "a free Church in a free State."[85] As noted above, freedom is a key theme for public theology's apologetic approach. Due to human freedom, sin entered the world, hence freedom, which is "a gift of God" and "the mark of being genuinely human," becomes an absolute necessity. Stackhouse explains: "A God who leaves no place for error, contrition, and free choosing of what is right and good is not a God who can touch the core of human existence, just as no social arrangement that destroys freedom in a totally regulated environment can sustain human loyalty."[86]

Based on this principle of freedom, Kuyper refused both papal supremacy (which he called ecclesiasticism) and Caesaropapism, which subordinate church and state one to another. For Kuyper, the church-controlled culture of ecclesiasticism, which promotes the idea of a theocratic state, was simply unthinkable. Theocratic rule by the church denies the concept of sphere sovereignty, since it allows the church to usurp the realm of the state. Moreover, since the doctrine of God's sovereignty claims that only the Triune God is sovereign over all of life, then the church—by also claiming sovereignty over all spheres of life—has pretended to be God. Wherever this theocratic rule of the church was established, it always ended, as Kuyper claimed, "in tyranny and the corruption of the people."[87]

Due to his commitment to sphere sovereignty, Kuyper also rejected the Caesaropapism, which promotes a "state church" by allowing the church to be controlled by the state. Despite the government's dignity, Kuyper maintained that "the sovereignty, by the grace of God, of the government is here set aside and limited, for God's sake, by another sovereignty, which is equally divine in origin."[88] "The sovereignty of the State and the sovereignty of the Church" should "exist side by side" and "mutually limit each other."[89]

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[82] See Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper*, ed. Bratt, 461–90.

[83] See Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 29–41.

[84] See David Hollenbach, "Afterword: A Community of Freedom," in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 323–43.

[85] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 99.

[86] Stackhouse, *Public Theology*, 29–30.

[87] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 35.

[88] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 96.

[89] Ibid., 107.

When these two different natures are mixed, it causes "a terrible confusion of the two spheres of life."[90]

Kuyper opposed Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, which states that one primary task of the magistrate is to protect and promote true worship, destroy the kingdom of antichrist, and promote the kingdom of Christ. Being aware that this came from Calvin, Kuyper argued that a Constantinian influence existed in Calvin's approach and that it was a mistake for Christians to accept this position.[91] At the Synod of Utrecht in 1905, Kuyper persuaded his denomination, the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) to remove these words and amend the confession.[92] The revised article states that instead of coercively promoting true religion, the state "must countenance the preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere, that God may be honored and worshipped by everyone, as He commanded in his Word."[93]

2. *Confessional Pluralism*

Neo-Calvinism also promotes the idea of confessional pluralism, which Gordon Spykman defines as "the right of the various religious groups that make up a society to develop their own patterns of involvement in public life through their own associations—school, political parties, labor unions, churches, and so on—to promote their views."[94] Unlike sphere sovereignty, confessional pluralism, which presupposes a plurality of religions, is not normative because it has resulted from sin and is not what God desires. In the parable of the wheat and weeds (Matt 13:24–31, 36–43) Christ teaches that he is the only one who has the right to exercise the ultimate judgment of the wicked. Christ has never promised the state that he would give it the guidance of the Holy Spirit to enable it to distinguish the true church from the false.[95] This is to say that neither Christians nor other religious communities should have special privileges in society.

Based on confessional pluralism, ecclesiasticism cannot be justified since it creates "a religion of the church" with special privileges in society. Nothing is wrong with the intention of the ecclesiastical authority to give a "Christian direction" to various spheres of life, as the doctrine of God's sovereignty

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[90] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 35.

[91] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 100.

[92] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 64.

[93] Henry Beets, *The Reformed Confession Explained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929), 271.

[94] Gordon Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 79.

[95] Ibid., 85–86.

indicates that God's rule must be acknowledged over all spheres of human activity. Its mistake, as Richard Mouw has put it, "was investing the church with the power to mediate that rule."[96] The task of professing God's sovereignty over all of life must be done by "collective entities within each of the spheres." Kuyper's founding of a Reformed academic institution is a good practical example. He named it the *Vrije Universiteit*—"Free University"—because he wanted it to be free from church and state control. The Christian identity of the university, which was based on "Reformed principles" for academic life, would be taken care of by "a Christian association" independent of both church and state.[97]

By being subordinated to the power of the state, the state church loses its transcendental character. The kingdom of Christ is subordinated to the temporal power of the state. The danger of Caesaropapism, as Kuyper put it, was that it leads "to the spiritual death of the church and thus to the loss of spiritual knowledge of God's Word as it pertains also to government."[98] Kuyper regretted the fact that the Lutheran territories in Germany advocated the spirit of Caesaropapism, which in Protestant circles was later called Erastianism.[99]

The two features foundational to neo-Calvinist public theology—sphere sovereignty and confessional pluralism—are indispensable to a genuinely pluralistic society that would provide equal justice for all in family life, politics, education, and religion.

3. *A Religious State*

Not only did Kuyper challenge all illegitimate forms of civil government, he also offered a legitimate and normative form:

> And that therefore neither the Caesaropapy of the Czar of Russia; nor the subjection of the State to the Church taught by Rome; nor the "Cuius regio eius religio [whose realm, his religion]" of the Lutheran jurists; nor the irreligious neutral standpoint of the French revolution; but that only the system of a free Church, in a free State, may be honored from a Calvinistic standpoint.[100]

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[96] Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 40.

[97] Ibid., 42.

[98] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 35.

[99] Ibid.; cf. Peter A. Lillback, "The Relationship of Church and State," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 686–87.

[100] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 106.

Three things should be noted from Kuyper's emphasis. First, his Calvinistic idea of the state honors the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Since civil government is ordained by God and has divinely appointed governing tasks, it should submit to God's transcendent norms. In this regard, civil government, according to Kuyper, should consider itself "a servant of God" (Rom 13:4), in the sense that "willingly or unwillingly, it is and remains dependent on God."[101]

Second, by being a servant of God, the government goes beyond mere dependence on him. The government "must acknowledge its calling to serve God,"[102] and its chief task is to promote outward and temporal justice and morality in society (Rom 13:1–5). Kuyper rejected the spirit of papal supremacy advocated by Rome, which subordinates government and its earthly kingdom tasks under the spiritual control of the pope.

Third, when undertaking its tasks as a servant of God, the government "stands outside the domain of revealed religion," but it possesses the "natural knowledge of God" and not "the supernatural kind, at least not directly."[103] In other words, religion is inseparable from politics. Kuyper emphasized that there should be "no separation between religion and state but only between state and church."[104] He therefore objected to the secular state that resulted from the French Revolution, which promoted an irreligious neutral standpoint.

In short, neo-Calvinism, according to James Smith, is an alternative to the worldviews of ecclesiasticism and secularism. While the former creates "a theocratic state," the latter, according to Kuyper, promotes "a secular state."[105] Smith argues that as a third way, neo-Calvinism "has often been fighting on two fronts":

> On the one hand, it has functioned as an internal critique of Christian hegemony over public life and the political sphere in particular …. This is [neo-Calvinism's] anti-Constantinian, antiestablishment, (supposedly) anti-Christendom move …. On the other hand, [neo-Calvinism] also pushes back on the myth of any feigned secular "neutrality" in the political sphere …. It argued that democratic, pluralistic societies need to make room for religious voices and religious communities in the wider web of civil society as a matter of societal health.[106]

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[101] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 49.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 65–66.
[104] Ibid., 354.
[105] Ibid., 34–35, 58, 61.
[106] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 134–35.

Thus, Kuyper viewed the state neither as theocratic nor secular but as acknowledging God's sovereignty. Kuyper calls his idea "a Christian nation," meaning "a nation not without God."[107] However, his *Christian nation* could be misleading and confused with *Christian state*, which he rejected.[108] I therefore prefer to call Kuyper's state a *religious state*.

4. *Civil Public Square*

Although the spheres are independent, they are called to work together to promote a "wholesome community life."[109] Spykman calls collaboration among the various social spheres "a sphere universality."[110] In terms of the religion-state relationship, in line with Calvin, Kuyper argued that although church and state are separate, they each have a responsibility toward the other.[111] The issue is then of how the state should fulfill its responsibility toward the church and the church toward the state.

With regard to the state's responsibility toward the church, it should accept "the presence of conflicting faith-communities within its bounds" and not discriminate against people because of their religious convictions. The state should safeguard religious freedom for all of its citizens and guarantee their equal rights.[112] In this regard, James Skillen explains,

> The just treatment of every citizen requires of government the fair and equitable protection of a variety of religions, not because every religion is presumed to be equally correct or true on theological or ecclesiastical grounds but because government's competence to establish public justice coupled with its incompetence to define and enforce religious orthodoxy leads to a *civic-moral* conclusion that there should be fair and equitable confessional pluralism.[113]

However, in Kuyper's view, when different spheres clash, then the state has "to compel mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each; [and] to defend individuals and the weak ones, in those [spheres], against the abuse of power of the rest."[114]

As regards the church's responsibility toward the state, Kuyper challenged secularism and its idea of a secular state, which removes religion from

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[107] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 49.
[108] Ibid., 60.
[109] Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," 80.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467–68.
[112] Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," 85–86.
[113] James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 84.
[114] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 97.

the public sphere. Neo-Calvinism contends that as a created order, civil government derives its power and authority from God and should therefore subject itself to God's claim of sovereignty. For this reason, it rejects "neutrality" in the political sphere. It is impossible for the political sphere to be free from any religious element, hence Roy Clouser's terminology, "the myth of religious neutrality."[115] For Kuyper, an "irreligious neutral standpoint" as proposed by the French Revolution is simply unrealistic.[116]

Moreover, by relegating religious voices to the private domain, the secular state not only usurps the domain of religion but also restricts the rights of religion and opposes sphere sovereignty. Kuyper, according to Hiemstra, rejected this exclusively secular public realm as "discriminatory, unjust, and intolerant."[117] Therefore Kuyper's neo-Calvinism, with its deep commitment to God's sovereignty, is, as Ryan McIlhenny put it, "the best weapon against the secularism of the modern age."[118]

Realizing the importance of Kuyper's influence on contemporary society, I would like to conclude by quoting James Bratt's observation in his book, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*: "Perhaps Kuyper's greatest significance for our own religiously and culturally fractured world is the way he proposed for religious believers to bring the full weight of their convictions into public life while fully respecting the rights of others in a pluralistic society under a constitutional government."[119]

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[115] See Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

[116] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 106.

[117] Hiemstra, "A Calvinist Case," 60.

[118] Ryan C. McIlhenny, "Introduction: In Defense of Neo-Calvinism," in *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, ed. Ryan C. McIlhenny (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), xviii.

[119] James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), xiii.

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Kuyper and Reformed Public Theology: Family, Freedom, and Fortune

JOHN WITTE JR. AND ERIC WANG

Abstract

This article introduces and illustrates the public theology developed by Dutch theologian, philosopher, and statesman Abraham Kuyper at the turn of the twentieth century. Much like Pope Leo XIII transformed modern Catholicism with a new social teaching movement grounded in neo-Thomist thought, Kuyper transformed modern Protestantism with a new public theology grounded in the Reformed tradition going back to John Calvin. Combining close biblical and catechetical exegesis with sweeping theological and political doctrines of the created order, social pluralism, covenant doctrine, and sphere sovereignty, Kuyper defended traditional teachings on the family, offered strikingly modern theories of ordered liberty and orderly pluralism, and stuck to a principled but pragmatic program on property, labor, and economics.

Keywords

Abraham Kuyper, Calvinism, creation order, orderly pluralism, family, freedom, education, labor, property, social welfare

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was one of the great polymaths in the history of the Netherlands and in the Calvinist tradition. He was a formidable theologian and philosopher, journalist and educator, churchman and statesman of extraordinary accomplishment. He published some 223 scholarly works[1] and thousands of devotionals,[2] sermons, speeches, lectures, letters, op-eds, briefing papers, and media quotes. He served for nearly half a century as editor-in-chief of both the Dutch daily *Standaard* and the weekly *Heraut*. He founded the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880 and taught there intermittently for two decades. Throughout much of his career, Kuyper was also a leader of the Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands and served as a Member of Parliament beginning in 1874, then as Minister of Justice, and finally as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905.

English readers have long had access to several of Kuyper's basic texts in translation and to several studies of his life and work.[3] But the expert translation and emerging publication of a new twelve-volume series of Kuyper's *Collected Works of Public Theology*, masterminded by Jordan Ballor and Melvin Flikkema at the Acton Institute, give English readers a much more nuanced portrait of Kuyper's wide-ranging intellect and sterling accomplishments in multiple fields.[4] Here readers can find an excellent cross-section of his work over a long career—multivolume theological tomes, expansive political platforms and policy statements, learned sermons and speeches, pithy op-eds, and popular articles.

These new publications serve not only to solidify Kuyper's place high on the honor roll of great Dutch Calvinists, they also help secure his standing as a towering Christian public intellectual of the later nineteenth century,

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We express our gratitude to Jordan Ballor of the Acton Institute for giving us access to and permission to quote from manuscripts of Abraham Kuyper's twelve-volume *Collected Works of Public Theology* now in production. This essay is adapted in part from John Witte Jr.'s introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *On Charity and Justice*, in Melvin Flikkema and Jordan Ballor, eds., *Collected Works in Public Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, forthcoming).

[1] See James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), xi. See the invaluable 756-page guide: Tjitze Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography, 1857–2010*, ed. Barend Meijer (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[2] George Harinck, foreword to Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper*, xiii (referencing ca. 2200 devotionals).

[3] See the twenty-eight-volume collection of works by and on Kuyper edited by James D. Bratt et al., *Abraham Kuyper Comprehensive Studies Collection*, https://lexhampress.com/product/129570/abraham-kuyper-comprehensive-studies-collection.

[4] James D. Bratt et al., ed., *Abraham Kuyper Comprehensive Studies Collection* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015–).

ABRAHAM KUYPER
1837–1920

whose teachings offer an enduring and edifying witness to modern churches, states, and societies alike. Much as his contemporary Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) led a retrieval and reconstruction of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and the Thomist tradition to reform modern Catholicism, so Kuyper helped revive and renew the best teachings of John Calvin and the Reformed tradition to reform modern Protestantism. Leo used natural law and subsidiarity theory to build a new "social teachings" movement for modern Catholic engagement with the world. Kuyper used theories of "creation order," "common grace," and "sphere sovereignty" to build a comparable Calvinist "public theology" movement for the Protestant world. Leo understood the need for the "development of doctrine" to keep Catholicism as a vital and valuable alternative to secular forms of liberalism and socialism in his day. Kuyper fought against these same political movements using an ethic of *semper reformanda*—a constant openness to reform traditional teachings in light of new insights from Scripture and the Spirit, and new challenges posed by the growing religious pluralism and rampant secularization of his day.[5]

In this brief article, we offer three samples of Kuyper's expansive public theology—his teachings on family, freedom, and fortune. With some of these teachings, Kuyper largely stuck to the Calvinist tradition, convinced of the cogency of his forebears' views and content to make only modest reforms. With others, he was transformative, urging reforms of thought and practice that still remain relevant today within and well beyond the Reformed world.

I. *Kuyper on Family*

Kuyper's discussion of the family—"the Christian household," as he put it—illustrates his more traditional side. The family was one of the first institutions that sixteenth-century Protestants had reformed root and branch.[6] Calvin in particular replaced medieval Catholic teachings that marriage is a sacrament under the canon law authority of the church with the idea that

[5] See, e.g., Jordan Ballor, ed., *Makers of Modern Christian Social Thought: Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper on the Social Question* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2016); Symposium, "A Century of Christian Social Teaching: The Legacy of Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 5 (2002): 1–304; David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 276–315; Russell Hittinger, "Pope Leo XIII," in *Modern Christian Teachings on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–73; Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, "Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920)," in ibid., 288–327.

[6] See John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 113–286.

marriage is a covenant under the spiritual guidance of the church and the legal governance of the Christian state. The Christian family was created by God as a "two in one flesh" union of "male and female" (Gen 1:27; 2:24). Couples were to court properly, and marriages were to be formed with mutual consent of the couple, parental consent on both sides, two or more witnesses, public state registration, and consecration and celebration in a church wedding. Both husbands and wives were called to respect the other's sexual bodies and needs and to abstain from sex only temporarily and by mutual consent (1 Cor 7:2–5). Spouses had to love, respect, and sacrifice for each other, although wives were "subject in everything to their husbands"—as Eve was made subject to Adam after the fall into sin and the church was called to be "subject to Christ" (Gen 3:16; Eph 5:21–33). God "hates divorce" (Mal 2:16) but allows it in cases of serious fault, like adultery or desertion (Matt 19:9; 1 Cor 7:15)—much as Yahweh himself threatened to "divorce" his beloved metaphorical bride Israel when she "played the harlot" in violation of the covenant (Ezek 16; Jer 3:7–8; Isa 50:1).[7]

The marital couple was called to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Both fathers and mothers were to nurture, educate, and discipline their children in loving preparation for their own vocations, marriages, and lives as adults. Adult children were to "honor and obey" their parents (Exod 20:12) and to care for them in their old age in exchange for presumptive inheritance. Church, state, school, and community alike were to support the family but without encroaching on its inner workings or liberties or subjecting it to the "covetous" privations of neighbors. Calvin and his protégé Theodore Beza had built an intricate theology, law, and practice of the covenant family for sixteenth-century Geneva, and this early example was echoed and elaborated in numerous Calvinist communities thereafter in Continental Europe, Great Britain, North America, the Caribbean, Africa, and colonial India and Indonesia.[8]

This Calvinist family heritage was still part of Dutch Reformed theology and culture in Kuyper's early years, and he quoted and cited these biblical texts and traditions with alacrity.[9] But Napoleon's legal reforms after the French Revolution catalyzed strong new efforts to reduce the church's

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[7] See sources and discussion in John Witte Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage and Family in John Calvin's Geneva*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 2021).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Abraham Kuyper, "Christ's Kingship and the Family," in Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege: Living under Christ's Kingship*, 2 vols., trans. Albert Gootjes, ed. John Kok with Nelson D. Kloosterman (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 299–462. See further texts and analysis in James D. Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper," in *Christianity and Family Law: An Introduction*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Gary S. Hauk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 291–306.

involvement in marriage; to foster greater sexual liberty and expression; to enhance women's suffrage, education, and public access; to protect both spouses' rights to marital property, easier divorce, child custody after marriage, and more.[10] Kuyper had rather little sympathy with most such family reforms, and he used the pulpit, press, and political platform to push hard against them. For he regarded the traditional family, and the concomitant division of public and private lives for men and women respectively, to be an essential cornerstone of ordered liberty and a properly organized society.[11]

The traditional family, Kuyper believed, was a fundamental model and incubator of the moral virtues of love and sacrifice, caring and sharing, discipline and vocation, authority and liberty. It was also a prototype for a properly structured and well-functioning state. Ideally, the relationship between husband and wife taught citizens to trust and cooperate with each other and with a legitimate government. Spouses who believed, accommodated, and defended each other modeled the actions of governments that trusted their subjects, citizens who accommodated their neighbors, and employers and employees who guarded each other's reputations and honors as well as their lives and limbs. The relationship between parents and children taught citizens to respect and restrain authority and liberty more generally. Children who revered their loving father as an authority who modeled uprightness would learn to respect the lawful state as a legitimate authority that established justice. Children who saw their mothers as advocates who corrected their father's faults and unfairness would learn to stand up for their constitutional rights and those of others when they were threatened by state authorities. The ongoing relationships between siblings taught citizens to resort to negotiation and litigation instead of violence and recrimination in working out their differences and maintaining their voluntary associations. Siblings who reasonably reported on each other's wrongdoings so that parents could correct, punish, and reconcile them to each other would grow into citizens who could resort as needed to lawsuits for courts to make fair judgments and order remedies and restitution. The relationship between masters and servants taught citizens the true meaning of "being of

[10] For a contemporaneous account, see L. J. van Apeldoorn, *Geschiedenis van het nederlandsche huwelijksrecht voor de invoering van de fransche wetsgeving* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1925).

[11] See, e.g., Abraham Kuyper, *Antirevolutionair óók in us Huisgezin* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880); Abraham Kuyper, *De Eerepositie der Vrouw* (Kampen: Kok, 1914), with other texts and analysis in Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, "Abraham Kuyper and the Cult of True Womanhood: An Analysis of *De Eerepositie der Vrouw*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 31 (1996): 97–124.

service and being served." Faithful maids, butlers, apprentices, and others who humbly served their masters and mistresses could show civil officials how to serve the state, pastors how to serve their churches, and citizens how to serve one another.[12]

This was Kuyper's ideal family ethic and structure and the reason he regarded the family as the cornerstone of the polis and political order. He believed that the values of the French Revolution were destroying these organic family relationships, and he thus summoned the Dutch to oppose these revolutionary reforms of domestic life and law. Against those who sought to elevate the woman's place in the family, Kuyper argued that husbands were to rule the household, not because of their merit or strength but because of God's divine ordinances for men's and women's earthly roles. Against those who believed parents had to earn the right to command their children's obedience, Kuyper argued that the Ten Commandments and the New Testament household codes alike gave parents binding authority over their children, who were called to "honor and obey them … so that their days may be long in the land" (Exod 20:12). Against those who sought to resolve family conflicts by sending unruly children to boarding school or filing for divorce for light causes, Kuyper argued that families were to be faithful to their marital and parental commitments, knowing that what "God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). Against those who reduced master-servant relationships to mere service contracts with stipulated duties, rights, and rewards, Kuyper argued that masters and servants were to "love each other" as they loved themselves—aware that, while they occupied different "stations" in life, they had equal "vocations" before God and were equally redeemed by the same blood of Christ and governed by the same Word of God.[13]

Many readers today will find Kuyper's traditional family values and household ecology to be quaint, obsolete, even offensive. But his teaching echoed the domestic ethics and theology of the family taught already by Calvin and other sixteenth-century Reformers. And these traditional teachings recurred for centuries thereafter in Calvinist and other Protestant lands and were set out in hundreds of catechisms, household manuals, and books of etiquette and deportment. These volumes were the spiritual "Dr. Spocks" of their day that copiously spelled out the reciprocal rights and

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[12] See Abraham Kuyper, "The Family, Society, and the State," in *On Charity and Justice*, ed. Matthew J. Tuininga (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, forthcoming; hereafter, *OCJ*), part 3–4. Because *OCJ* is forthcoming, we do not cite page numbers for *OCJ* references but instead cite section or part numbers when possible.

[13] Ibid., part 11–14.

duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and servants within a properly structured and governed Christian household.[14]

II. *Kuyper on Freedom*

Kuyper offered a robust and revisionist account of democracy and liberty, laying some of the foundations for modern forms of Christian liberalism and Christian democracy in the Netherlands and beyond. Kuyper rejected the "secular narrative"—popular in his day and pervasive in our own—that democracy and human rights were modern products of Enlightenment liberalism, individualism, and contractarianism and dependent on the new secular trinity of *liberté*, *égalité*, *et fraternité* born of the French Revolution. In line with some other historians of his day,[15] Kuyper argued that it was Calvinist theology, not Enlightenment liberalism, that laid many of the foundations for Western forms of constitutional democracy, limited government, enumerated rights, and rule of law.[16] Calvinism, Kuyper wrote, was not only a spiritual movement but also "a political movement which has guaranteed the liberty of nations in constitutional statesmanship; first in Holland, then in England [and Scotland], and since the close of the last century in the United States." It was Calvinists who first "lifted up freedom of conscience" and insisted that "the magistrate has nothing to do with a person's innermost beliefs ... or with a person's domestic life or friendships." It was Calvinists who first "reached the conclusions that follow from this liberty of conscience, for the liberty of speech, and the liberty of worship ... and the free expression of thought ... and ideas." It was Calvinists who "first developed the principle of separation of church and state" and the constitutional recognition that "the Church derives its authority directly from God, not mediately through the state or through the community." It was Calvinists who first effectively "protest[ed] against State-omnicompetence; against the horrible conception that no right exists above and beyond existing [positive] laws; and against the pride of absolutism [which is] death to our civil liberties." It was Calvinists who first pressed classical theories of

[14] See examples and analysis in John Witte Jr., *Church, State, and Family: Reconciling Traditional Teachings and Modern Liberties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 106–28.

[15] See, e.g., George Jellinek, *Die Erklärung der Menschen- und Bürgerrechte: Ein Beitrag zur modernen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1895); with distillation of later scholarship in Josef Bohatec, *England und die Geschichte der Menschen- und Bürgerrecht*, 3rd ed., ed. Otto Weber (Graz: Böhlau, 1956).

[16] The next six paragraphs are adapted in part and updated from John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 321–34.

mixed government into constitutional principles of federalism and republicanism, separation of powers, and checks and balances between them. And it was Calvinists who led the first democratic revolutions against tyrannical authorities in France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[17]

Not only had Calvinists defined, defended, and died for many features of democratic constitutionalism well before the Enlightenment broke out, Kuyper continued, Calvinists also grounded their political teachings in sturdier theological propositions than the thinner derivative postulates of later Enlightenment liberalism. Instead of postulating a mythical "state of nature," as the liberal *philosophes* did, Calvinists grounded their teachings in the orders of creation and the commandments of God. Instead of assuming that natural human life was lawlessly "brutish, nasty and short," they emphasized the natural restraints of God's law written on all hearts and God's common grace which "shines in all that's fair."[18] Instead of seeing natural rights as pathways to a self-interested pursuit of life, liberty, and property of the sovereign individual, they saw rights as opportunities to discharge divine duties set out in the Decalogue and other moral laws. Instead of seeing constitutions as social and government contracts between individuals designed to protect individual rights, they treated constitutions as divinely modeled covenants between the rulers, people, and God designed to protect human and associational rights, to break up and bracket political power, and to encourage and celebrate godly values. Instead of seeing free speech, free exercise, or free assembly as individual rights limited only by the rights of others and the boundaries of treason, Calvinists saw them as constitutional expressions of the biblical teaching that all persons are called by Christ to be prophets, priests, and kings in the world, with duties to speak, serve, and rule with others in the creation and protection of a godly republic. Drawing on these and many other such dialectics, Kuyper hammered out a striking new history of Christianity, democracy, and human rights, and a sturdy new platform of Christian liberalism.[19]

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[17] Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, n.d.), 51:387–88, 415; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 105–9; Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties," in *Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 279–322.

[18] Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); see also Richard J. Mouw, introduction to *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, by Abraham Kuyper, 2 vols., ed. Jordan Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and E. M. van der Maas (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), xviii–xxx.

[19] Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 105–9; Kuyper, "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold," 279–322; Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 19–54, 92–101, 155–207, 297–323; Abraham Kuyper,

Kuyper not only retrieved traditional Calvinist teachings on freedom, he also reformed them for his day. Despite Calvinism's support for freedom of conscience and liberty of speech, Calvin's Geneva and many later Reformed communities on both sides of the Atlantic instituted firm censorship and licensing rules and silenced or ostracized outspoken dissenters. Kuyper rejected such encroachments and advocated vigorous freedom of speech and press. He drew inspiration from seventeenth-century English poet and philosopher John Milton, an early Calvinist champion of freedom of speech and press whom Kuyper lauded.[20] Milton emphasized that God's universal calling to be prophets, priests, and kings gave everyone the right and duty to speak, write, and debate in church and state, family and society, and school and business at once. This was the real driving force of a *semper reformanda* ethic, Milton argued. This was the best way to pursue the truth of God and Scripture, reason and nature, all to be discovered by free and robust education and inquiry, experiment and debate, publication and conversation. Only when freed from the tyranny of prelates and monarchs, of ignorance and error, of censors and licensors, Milton believed, could divine, natural, and human truth finally be discovered and developed. Only when bad speech was countered by good speech in a free and open exchange would the public good ultimately be enhanced.[21]

Milton proved to be a lonely and neglected prophet in his day, and his ideas would take another two centuries to penetrate deeply into Western constitutionalism. But Kuyper reflected some of these same Miltonian sentiments. As a journalist, he saw the free press as a vital "estate," even an independent "social sphere," in a well-ordered and accountable democratic society. The press was a necessary check on the excesses and abuses of all authorities, even an "apostle of peace" for a divided and tumultuous world, he wrote. Furthermore, as an educator, Kuyper prized literacy and learning not only as a means for every person to read Scripture and train for their Christian vocation, as Protestants had long taught, but also as a great leveler and elevator of human society. Proper education for all gave full voice to all, especially the "little people" (*kleine luiden*) too often shut out and shut down from public deliberation. Kuyper was not into American-style free

"The Ordinances of God," in *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*, ed. James W. Skillen and Rockne M. McCarthy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 242–57. See detailed sources and discussion in Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, passim.

[20] See, e.g., Kuyper, "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold," 292–97.

[21] See Witte, *Reformation of Rights*, 259–71 and expanded in John Witte Jr., "Prophets, Priests, and Kings of Liberty: John Milton and the Reformation of Rights and Liberties in England," *Emory Law Journal* 57 (2008): 1527–604.

speech absolutism, nor was he an unqualified advocate of "an open marketplace of ideas" or popular sovereignty above all else. He called for civility, not "rudeness," in all speech and writing and constructive engagement, not crass materialist or prurient excess. He also had little sympathy for hate speech, insurrectionary rhetoric, or expressions of "class egoism." While sometimes betraying prejudices in his early writing and speeches, Kuyper at his best called for respectful discussion of and public engagement with Jews, Muslims, and other "peoples of God."[22]

Looking abroad, Kuyper defended other democratic institutions and liberties. He often lauded the United States of his day as a model of the kind of system he advocated for the Netherlands and beyond.[23] "America lacks no single liberty for which in Europe we struggle," Kuyper wrote. "In America there is absolute liberty of conscience," and "no citizen of the State may be compelled to remain in a church which his conscience forces him to leave." In America, there is "separation of church and state," which provides a "better guarantee [of] ... ecclesiastical liberty than anything that now prevails in Europe." The state does not establish or prescribe religious texts, beliefs, or practices. It does not interfere in matters of church polity, property, or personnel. Nor does it "subsidize the churches" or collect their tithes. "In America, Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, and Methodists are equally respected," each part of the "multiform manifestation of the Church of Christ on earth."[24] Also respected are peaceable Jews, Muslims, and other "people of faith." Indeed, Kuyper argued, "all things within the forum of conscience and on domestic and private life must be

[22] See *OCJ*, chaps. 2, 6, and 8 and further sources and discussion in James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 320–35.

[23] See analysis of Kuyper's deep engagement with America in John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Luis E. Lugo, ed., *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

[24] Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 5/1:387–88, 444–45; Abraham Kuyper, *Varia Americana* (Amsterdam and Pretoria: Höveker & Wormser, 1897) 18–22, 52–54, 136–62; Kuyper, "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold," 279–322; Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*, trans. and ed. Harry Van Dyke (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 351–63; Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige Godgeleerdheid* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), 3:614–24; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 106–9. Kuyper set out his church ideal briefly in Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, trans. and ed. Harry Boonstra et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), and more fully in Abraham Kuyper, *On the Church*, ed. John Halsey Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), esp. 377–437; for Kuyper's views of "State and Church" with discussion, see John Halsey Wood, *Going Dutch in the Modern Age: Abraham Kuyper's Struggle for a Free Church in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 142–75.

free—for the atheist as much as for the fully devout … indeed, for all sects."[25]

Kuyper also praised the American principle of associational liberty and social pluralism, seeing it as exemplary of his signature doctrine of "sphere sovereignty." The long American tradition of voluntarism and fraternity, Kuyper wrote, has led to ample legal protection not only of churches and religious organizations but also of a plurality of other "social spheres"—families, schools, unions, guilds, clubs, convents, corporations, and more. Each of these social spheres is amply protected by the provisions of state criminal law. Each is amply facilitated by the procedures of state private law. But none of these social spheres is ultimately dependent upon the state for its existence or for its competence. The formation and maintenance of each social sphere depend upon the voluntary association and activity of private parties. The competence and authority of each social sphere, furthermore, depends upon "its innate norms," its "God-given liberty"—its "inherent sphere sovereignty."[26]

"Sphere sovereignty" does not render a social sphere "a law unto itself"—just as personal sovereignty does not make each person a law unto himself or herself. Instead, sphere sovereignty entails that each of these social spheres has the liberty to operate independently of the state in accordance with its own God-given norms and in deference to the liberty interests of other social spheres and of all individuals. "There exists side-by-side with the personal sovereignty [of the individual conscience], the sovereignty of the [social] sphere." And the "rights and liberties of social life" exercised by and within these social spheres, come "from the same source from which the high authority of government flows—even the absolute sovereignty of God. From this one source, in God, sovereignty in the individual sphere, in the family, and in every social circle, is just as directly derived as the supremacy of state authority." A plurality of spheres of personal, ecclesiastical, social, and political liberty thus stand alongside each other—each ultimately created by and accountable to God. A plurality of offices and activities within each sphere of liberty also stand alongside each other—each designed to discharge some portion of God's special calling for that sphere. This understanding of associational liberty and social pluralism, which Kuyper found so well expressed in late-nineteenth-century America,

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[25] Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 5/1:415. See, e.g., Abraham Kuyper, *Liberalisten en Joden* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1878) and Abraham Kuyper, *On Islam*, trans. Jan van Vliet, ed. James D. Bratt and Douglas A. Howard (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017).

[26] See *OCD*, chap. 4; Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 90–99; Kuyper, *Varia Americana*, 38–49; Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, 5/1:73–186; Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie*, 3:322–30.

was an essential plank of his own political platform in the Netherlands.[27] And Kuyper's teaching on "sphere sovereignty" has proved to be one of his most enduring and pervasive contributions to contemporary discussion of social and legal pluralism, both in Europe and North America.[28]

III. *Kuyper on Fortune*

As part and product of his theories of divine sovereignty, sphere sovereignty, and creation order, Kuyper also provided many cogent and compelling reflections on "fortune"—an umbrella term for questions of property, stewardship, work, labor, business practices, poverty, and pensions. Kuyper's teachings on these themes both echoed and reformed the Calvinist tradition.

Like Calvin, Kuyper started from the conviction that God alone, as the creator of the cosmos *ex nihilo*, is the absolute owner of everything.[29] Humans receive everything they have as a divine gift, and God commands them to steward, not squander their possessions. Humans are to "dress and keep" the garden as God's lords of creation (Gen 2:15; Ps 8:5–8), to offer to God the first fruits of their labor (Deut 26:2), and to use their property to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Like Calvin, Kuyper commended work and condemned idleness, championing the Protestant teaching that God calls all persons to a "vocation" that best suits their natural abilities and gifts. But "if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess 3:10). Like Calvin, Kuyper drew on the Bible to condemn rampant usury, gambling, speculation, vanity, and "worship of mammon." And like Calvin, Kuyper reminded his fellow churchgoers that Christ loved and lived with the poor; Christ himself took on "the form of a servant" (Phil 2:6–7), became poor to make man rich (2 Cor 8:9), found "nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58),

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[27] See Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 95–96; Kuyper, *Our Program*, 16-22.

[28] See illustrative texts in Skillen and McCarthy, eds., *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society* and a recent illustration in Kent A. Van Til, "Abraham Kuyper and Michael Walzer: The Justice of the Spheres," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005): 267–89. For two recent legal adaptions of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty theory, see Johan D. van der Vyver, *Leuven Lectures on Religious Institutions, Religious Communities and Rights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Paul Horwitz, *First Amendment Institutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[29] See Abraham Kuyper, "You Shall Not Steal: Commentary on Lord's Day 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism," in *On Business and Economics*, ed. Jordan Ballor (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, forthcoming [hereafter, *OBE*], sec. 2. Because *OBE* is forthcoming, we do not cite page numbers for *OBE* references but instead cite section or part numbers when possible. For context, see André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, ed. Edward Dommen, trans. James Greig (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, 2006); Eric Kerridge, *Usury, Interest, and the Reformation* (London: Routledge, 2017).

proclaimed good news to the poor (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22), fed the hungry with bread and fish (Matt 14:14–21), and chose lowly fishermen to be his disciples (Matt 4:18–22). All Christians were to serve the poor, needy, orphans, and sojourners in their midst, for "as much as you do it to the least of these you do it to me," Jesus had said (Matt 25:45). And the church itself was to maintain the diaconate to collect and distribute alms to the "deserving poor"—those who, despite their best efforts, still needed help.[30] All this was standard biblical and homiletic lore that Kuyper rehearsed repeatedly.

However, the gusts and gales of Dutch industrialization were posing profound new socioeconomic changes and challenges to the Netherlands and much of the West. Now that employers had access to newfound steam power, electricity, and machinery, many enterprises no longer needed so much manual labor or were growing too large to heed local labor concerns. With open trade, population growth, and foreign workers intensifying competition, Dutch workers were finding it harder to get and keep their jobs. The old systems of guilds that had long guarded local craftsmen's interests were giving way to more *laissez-faire* business practices that left many workers with lower wages, longer working hours, and harder working conditions. Many workers were forced to sign easily terminable contracts and later lost their jobs or began to slide into poverty. The Industrial Revolution, Kuyper wrote, stripped workers of a "sense of security" in life. In response, workers in Kuyper's day were picketing and striking, boycotting goods, sabotaging factories, and joining trade unions that endorsed violence. Kuyper labeled the new challenges of industrialization, labor, unemployment, and poverty as "*the* social question" that needed the urgent attention of all spheres of life, including notably the state.[31]

Kuyper took on this "social question" repeatedly in sermons and speeches, pamphlets and policy platforms. He started with the premise that laborers have rights that need to be honored. These rights are grounded in the creation order and described more fully in Scripture. All human beings, Kuyper wrote, have a right (and duty) to work, because they are made in the image of a God who always worked. All workers have a right to a living

[30] For Kuyper's view, see in *OBE*, "You Shall Not Steal," sec. 3–5; "Meditations: Do Not Work for the Food That Perishes (John 6:27)"; "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," part 2; "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners." Also see in *OCJ*, "Christ and the Needy." For Calvin's view, see Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 128, 135–36, 278–82, 282–86, 288–95, 301–2, 309–13, 316–21, 356–62, 406–16.

[31] See in *OBE*, "Manual Labor," part 4; "The Social Question (1917)," sec. 21–34; "Social Organizations under Our Own Banner." See also his earlier reflections in Abraham Kuyper, *Eenige Kameradviezen* (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1890), esp. 139–203 ("Sociale Quaestie"), speeches on child labor (139–82), and rights of workers (191–97).

wage, so they can discharge their God-given natural duties to care for their children who, in turn, must care for them when they become elderly. The order of nature also makes clear that workers have a right to some form of pension, Kuyper argued, particularly when they lack natural kin networks. Employers who pay too little to provide their workers with "sustenance from cradle to grave" conflict with God's ordinances set out in Scriptural teachings in Luke 10:7, James 5:4, Deuteronomy 25:4, and Leviticus 19:13. Workers also have a God-given right to rest and honor the Sabbath in accordance with God's commandment in the Decalogue, "so that their days may be long in the land which the Lord has given them" (Exod 20:8–12). Having that regular Sabbath day rest allows workers and their families to care for their bodies and souls, to fulfill their divine callings to worship, and to honor their parental and marital duties. Finally, given their ample toil and suffering, Kuyper argued that workers have a right to organize themselves, to "lodge … complaint[s] against a social order that deprive[s]" them of what God has ordained they are to have.[32]

A growing number of socialists in the Netherlands and well beyond had sought to answer "the social question" by calling for the abolition of property in favor of communal ownership. Kuyper strongly rejected this view and argued that God had established not only labor rights but also property rights, especially rights to the fruits of one's labor. Already at creation, Kuyper argued, God had created humans with "an awareness of the distinction between … mine and thine." These created natural rights of property were confirmed in the commandments "thou shalt not steal" (Exod 20:5) and "thou shalt not covet," which set out the reciprocal natural duty to respect the property rights of another.[33]

Against both socialists who sought to dismantle property rights and market structures and capitalists who downplayed market problems and impoverished workers, Kuyper outlined new roles for church and state in confronting "the social question." In "normal" situations, Kuyper wrote, the church was to assume responsibility for assisting the poor with their spiritual and material needs. Those churches that focused exclusively on spiritual needs ignored the reality that Jesus held promises "for the present life" (1 Tim 4:8). Those that focused exclusively on material needs neglected that Jesus was far more than a social reformer. Thus, the church was not

[32] See in *OBE*, "Meditations: Do Not Work for the Food That Perishes (John 6:27)"; "You Shall Not Steal," sec. 5; "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners"; "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," part 4.

[33] See in *OBE*, "You Shall Not Steal," sec. 1–2.

only to share the gospel but also to implement a diaconate funding system wherein alms were collected from all and discreetly donated to those in need. Miserly charity was insulting, and ad hoc philanthropy was inadequate to meet the biblical commands to love and care for our neighbors.[34]

Kuyper recognized, however, that the Industrial Revolution had put the Netherlands in an "abnormal" situation that required state intervention as well. Perfect equality of work, wages, and possessions was neither possible nor desirable. But the state had to provide at least a "para-equality," Kuyper argued, so that all people could meet their basic needs of "shelter, bed, clothing, and the daily morsel." Ideally, workers would save enough for their own pensions even while meeting their basic needs. But even prudent workers with families often had barely enough to live on, let alone save. Given current conditions, the state thus had to provide temporary pension funding and mandate participation in an insurance scheme run by employers and employees. God was the absolute owner of all creation, Kuyper repeated, but the state was to act as God's appointed "master of all goods," judiciously distributing property to meet the minimum needs of all its subjects, facilitating a welfare and pension system that provided sustenance "from cradle to grave" and resolving property disputes when they arose.[35]

The doctrine of sphere sovereignty, however, put limits on the state's power even in this emergency context. The state was to help workers secure their labor rights and minimum property needs, but it had to respect the sovereignty of the separate sphere of labor and capital, employer, and employee. Thus, though workers had rights to a living wage, a Sabbath, and a pension, Kuyper wrote, the state, could *not* directly raise wages, shorten work weeks, or stipulate universal terms for all employer-employee contracts. For the state to intervene so directly in a domain that was "sovereign in its own sphere and governed by its own laws" would eventually "leave every sphere of society at the mercy of the magistrate."[36]

Instead, Kuyper proposed, the state was to create a legal framework for laborers and employers to organize themselves and negotiate their interests.[37] Specifically, this meant that for every industry, the state could require workers and employers to join an industrial organization, with separate bodies of employees and employers. Each of these bodies in turn, was to

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[34] See in *OBE*, "The Social Question and the Christian Religion," parts 2 and 4; "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners"; "The Workers' Issue and the Church."

[35] See in *OCJ*, "Christ and the Needy," part 7; *OBE*, "Draft Pension Scheme for Wage Earners"; "You Shall Not Steal," sec. 4.

[36] *OBE*, "Manual Labor," part 3.

[37] Ibid., part 4.

elect representatives onto a "higher body"—a mixed board of employers and employees—that jointly made decisions for firms within the industry:

> This higher body can then determine whatever needs regulation, such as the apprenticeship system, technical training, working hours (differentiated by age, region, and type of industry); wage levels (according to skill, trade and age); unemployment provisions; insurance plans against illness, disability, and old age; all differentiated by branch. Employers and employees can work together to increase production and markets, and in general, each within their sphere of influence, promote the flourishing of their companies. They can draw up rules governing contracts, factory regulations, days off, Sunday rest, and so much more—all in the context of their companies and therefore directly relevant and practicable.[38]

The state's role was to enforce these jointly made decisions and consult with chambers of labor and chambers of commerce when doing so.[39] Adhering to a tripartite model of industrial cooperation between the state, labor, and capital, the Dutch could both answer the pressing needs of the *proletariat* and honor the sovereignty God had bestowed upon society's separate spheres. Kuyper's ideas of tripartite cooperation, Ballor writes, factored into a growing tradition of consensus decision-making in the Netherlands that became known as the "polder model."[40]

Conclusions

These three brief case studies on family, freedom, and fortune illustrate the method, depth, range, and prescience of Kuyper's public theology. Kuyper moved freely from close biblical and catechetical exegesis to lofty philosophical and theological propositions and had a real talent for pithy op-eds and soaring speeches. He expounded at length his core principles of creation order, common grace, and sphere sovereignty but worked hard to translate them into specific precepts, prescriptions, and policy statements—all amply leavened with a hearty Dutch ethic of common sense, generosity, prudence, practicality, and political adaptability. Kuyper remained faithful to the Reformed and broader Christian tradition. He was particularly drawn to the core teachings of Calvin, who had led a comparable sweeping reform of church, state, family, school, charity, economy, publication, and diplomacy in sixteenth-century Geneva, which he set out in fifty-nine thick volumes of *Opera* that were being published just as Kuyper set out to work

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[38] *OBE*, "Industrial Organization."
[39] Ibid.; "Manual Labor," part 5.
[40] Jordan Ballor, "Text Introduction" to Kuyper, "Industrial Organization" in *OBE*.

in earnest.[41] But while Calvin, on his death bed, had famously instructed his successors to "Change nothing!" in Reformed Geneva, Kuyper consistently embraced the more enduring Calvinist teaching to "Reform always!" as being more faithful to Scripture and tradition, more responsive to the needs of church, state, and society, and more effective in witnessing to the whole world.

This latter ethic of *semper reformanda* made Kuyper an ideal mediator of the evolving Calvinist tradition and an ideal broker to contend with the strong new forms of liberalism, socialism, capitalism, and fascism in his day. On marriage and family questions, Kuyper largely stuck to the Calvinist tradition. He conceded little in response to the multiple movements of his day for women's rights, marital fluidity, divorce reform, sexual liberation, and more, convinced that this would jeopardize the place of the marital family as a cornerstone of church and state, society and culture. On issues of freedom, Kuyper expounded robust theories and policies protecting freedom of religion, speech, press, and association, which in his view captured the best of the Calvinist tradition and accommodated the best insights of modern liberalism. Kuyper's theory of ordered liberty and orderly pluralism lay at the heart of his party's political programs for the Netherlands, although he thought the United States better approximated these ideals than any nation in Europe. On issues of fortune, Kuyper worked hard to defend the rights to property, labor, rest, and business, based on biblical principles. But given the ravages of the Industrial Revolution, he struck pragmatic new balances between church and state in providing for the poor, needy, and unemployed and in constructing new systems of pensions, social welfare, and diaconal care.

This is just a sampling of the many treasures in Kuyper's new twelve volumes of *Collected Works of Public Theology*. The editors and publisher have done invaluable service in bringing these rich writings together in a crisp critical English edition, expertly translated, judiciously edited, and handsomely produced in both print and digital formats. These volumes will help support the welcome Kuyper renaissance that is breaking out in many parts of the global Protestant world.

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[41] See recently Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Calvin's writings were published as *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum et al., 59 vols., Corpus Reformatorum Series 29–87 (Brunswick: Bretschneider, 1863–1900).

Doing Justice to Religious Diversity: Theological Foundations for "Principled Pluralism"

JONATHAN CHAPLIN

Abstract

This article argues a theological case for "principled pluralism," a particular stance regarding the proper attitude of the state towards the plural religious affiliations of its citizens. Its central claim is that the role of the state is both to defend the religious freedom of adherents to all faiths and to maintain a public square equally open to contributions from all faiths without publicly privileging any faith, even Christianity. It develops the argument in critical dialogue with a "Christian nation" position, according to which nations can exercise corporate religious agency, should be formed where possible according to Christian principles, and in which Christian citizens should call their governments to support the nation's Christian character.

Keywords

Principled pluralism, religious diversity, state, Christian nation, public square

Introduction

The issue of how contemporary states should respond to the reality of religious diversity in their territories is becoming one of the most contentious challenges of twenty-first-century politics. It is evidently bound up with a series of debates taking place under the heading of "multiculturalism."[1] But the phenomenon of religious diversity merits distinct treatment because of the need to distinguish between demands on states arising from cultural identities and those arising from religious identities, however closely the two are interwoven in concrete life.[2] The challenge of religious diversity is faced not only by Western liberal democracies but also by states which came later to democratization (such as India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and South Africa) and by authoritarian states (such as China, Myanmar, and, increasingly, Russia). Many countries in the latter two categories have had long experience of coping with religious diversity, with varying degrees of success. While my principal expertise is in liberal democracies, my central argument would apply, suitably contextualized, to any state.[3]

In European liberal democracies, the challenge of religious diversity is intensifying for at least three reasons. First, the substantial increase in global migration in recent decades has brought to such states significant numbers of residents adhering to unfamiliar religions. The public demands of such "new" religions seem strange and unsettling—as was the case when a devout Hindu sought permission to be cremated on an open-air funeral pyre in Newcastle, England, in 2009 (the request was conditionally granted but only after a legal struggle). Second, the steady advance of secularization has made religion *of any kind* appear increasingly eccentric in public settings, and in need of special justification. Third, some religious communities have been undergoing internal processes of "deprivatization." No longer content with accepting the privatized role traditionally allotted to them by liberal secularism, they are increasingly demanding not only public protection of their religious freedom but also public status and political influence. In much of Europe, Islam is the most visible player in this respect, as seen, for

[1] See Jonathan Chaplin, *Multiculturalism: A Christian Retrieval* (London: Theos, 2011), https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/Multiculturalism.pdf.

[2] This interweaving gives rise to, for example, what sociologists call "ethno-religious" communities, such as the British Pakistani community, which is overwhelmingly Muslim.

[3] For a creative application of "principled pluralism" to Indonesia, see Benyamin F. Intan, "Religious Freedom and the Pancasila-Based State of Indonesia: A Neo-Calvinist Idea of Principled Pluralism," 11th Annual Gaffin Lecture, March 14, 2018, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA.

example, in demands by Muslim women to wear distinctive clothing in public settings.[4] But a newly assertive conservative Christianity—Catholic, Evangelical, and Orthodox—is also vocally resisting the progressive secularization of public life and the marginalization of Christian faith which, it is claimed, results from it.[5] This was reflected, for example, in the (unsuccessful) campaign in the early 2000s for the inclusion of a reference to God in the proposed new constitution of the European Union.[6]

One distinctive Christian political response to the fact of religious diversity—prominent especially in North America—is known as "principled pluralism."[7] Principled pluralism is not a doctrine of "religious pluralism," according to which all religions are complementary routes toward the divine. Many principled pluralists (including me) reject this doctrine. Rather, it is a particular stance regarding the *proper attitude of the state* towards the plural religious affiliations of its citizens.[8] Deriving from longstanding commitments to religious toleration, its central claim is that the role of the state in a religiously diverse society is both to defend the religious freedom of adherents to all faiths (including secular ones) and to maintain a public square equally open to contributions from all faiths.[9] The state may not deliberately or officially prefer or privilege any such faith, even Christianity.

Many Christians in liberal democracies seem intuitively to support something like this view, even if only for pragmatic reasons (noted below). Many non-Western Christians also endorse it because they have never lived in majority-Christian states, have never experienced Christian privilege, and have long been accustomed to settling for, at best, equal status for

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[4] W. Cole Durham et al., eds., *Islam, Europe and Emerging Legal Issues* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012).

[5] See Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, eds., *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). "Evangelical Christianity" here includes both churches that are long established in European nations and newer immigrant churches, often made up of African Pentecostals.

[6] Guy Milton, "God and the Constitution," in *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, ed. Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 91–207.

[7] James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

[8] US-based evangelical commentator Os Guinness calls it "chartered pluralism." See Os Guinness, "Tribespeople, Idiots, Citizens?," in *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader*, ed. Gregory Wolfe (New York: Free Press, 1997), 190. See also Os Guinness, *The Global Public Square: Religious Freedom and the Making of a World Safe for Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

[9] On the theological foundations of religious freedom, see Thomas Schirrmacher and Jonathan Chaplin, "European Religious Freedom and the EU," in *God and the EU*, ed. Chaplin and Wilton, ch. 8; Rex Adhar and Ian Leigh, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 2.

Christianity, or, more typically, to striving and longing for freedom from marginalization or oppression. While for defenders of what I will call the "Christian nation" stance, principled pluralism would be experienced as a significant loss, for many non-Western Christians it would amount to an enormous gain. Whatever their contexts, however, Christians endorsing principled pluralism should seek robust theological reasons for it.

Principled pluralism is, of course, far from "the only game in town." The "Christian nation" response to religious diversity is not only still alive but winning increasing support. According to this view, a primary goal of Christian public action is to defend or restore the nation's essentially Christian character. This involves reminding a nation of its Christian heritage and, through a variety of means, leveraging the influence of that heritage to shore up the fabric of the nation today. This position is not committed to treating all faiths equally in the public realm.

The Christian nation stance is prominent in the United States of America, where it is associated with a highly problematic form of Christian "exceptionalism," long championed vocally by the "religious right" but also endorsed in more measured terms by, for example, conservative Catholics associated with *First Things* magazine.[10] The Christian nation stance has recently been profoundly sullied by the overt or tacit support lent to President Donald Trump by many "Christian nation" defenders, especially those claiming the title "Evangelical."[11] Meanwhile, a more moderate and less triumphalist version has been attracting growing support in certain European circles. In most European cases, defenders of a Christian nation position endorse the fundamental institutions and practices of liberal democracy (even though they hold that these cannot be sustained on an entirely secular foundation). By contrast, in the United States of America, large numbers of Evangelical Christians have tacitly endorsed President Trump's profoundly illiberal style of governance, while in Hungary, Prime Minister Victor Orbán has openly defended a model of "illiberal democracy" as consistent with his idiosyncratic rendition of "Christian Democracy."[12]

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[10] https://www.firstthings.com/.

[11] Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019). For critiques of the Christian nationalism behind this support, see Ronald J. Sider, ed., *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020); Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

[12] Shaun Walker, "Orbán Deploys Christianity with a Twist to Tighten Grip in Hungary," *The Guardian*, July 14, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/14/viktor-orban-budapest-hungary-christianity-with-a-twist. The great majority of post-war European Christian Democrats espoused something like principled pluralism.

Critics of the Christian nation view suggest that it is merely a defensive, reactionary position, advanced by those who cannot come to terms with their own loss of power and status. This is undoubtedly sometimes the case, especially in the United States. But advocates claim to find strong theological foundations for their stance, and it is important to test these against those adduced in favor of principled pluralism. A pragmatic defense of pluralism will not be enough. It will not do simply to say that once we lived in a Christian nation, but now we live in a religiously plural one and so we must accommodate our expectations and demands to the sheer fact of religious diversity (crudely, "We lost—let's get used to it"). For that could be taken to imply that if we achieved an electoral majority again (as some will claim has occurred in Hungary under Orbán's *Fidesz* party), we would be entitled to restore a public preference for Christianity. That would amount to a "strategic pluralism" but not a "principled" one: accepting plurality would be a temporary retreat on the way to the future goal of national re-Christianization.

I now compare the two positions, beginning with the Christian nation position and focusing on English articulations. Like all national variants, this has its idiosyncrasies, but the central planks of the position will emerge clearly enough.[13]

I. *The Christian Nation View*[14]

According to the Christian nation position, England—or "Britain," on some accounts[15]—was birthed as a Christian nation and continues to be framed predominantly by Christian influences. Advocates offer different assessments of how far that remains the case, but there is a common judgment that the core of the nation's identity—or, at least, some of its major public values, institutions and practices—remain in substance Christian. England is not simply an aggregation of individuals, the majority of whom who happen(ed) to be Christian. The very identity of the nation as an enduring corporate

[13] Space does not allow me to engage with the most sophisticated representative of this position, the British political theologian Oliver O'Donovan. See his *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a response, see my "Political Eschatology and Responsible Government: Oliver O'Donovan's 'Christian Liberalism,'" in *A Royal Priesthood? A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 265–308.

[14] This section draws on my "Can Nations Be Christian?," *Theology* 112 (November/December 2009): 410–24.

[15] I will not address the complex debate over whether, in this context, we should speak of "Britain" (or the "United Kingdom") or "England."

entity depends on its continuing adherence to the Christian faith, even if many or even a majority of individual citizens no longer believe in or practice Christianity. For public institutions to neglect or repudiate the legacy of Christian faith is to undermine the unique character of the nation's identity and to put at risk its main political achievements—freedom under law, accountable government, religious liberty, democracy, strong families, education committed to truth and virtue, and so forth. The task of the Christian community today, then, is to defend the Christian character of the nation as far as possible where it is under threat and, perhaps, to extend it where circumstances permit.

Anglican former Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali has been an articulate defender of such a position. He laments that public life in Britain is steadily losing its Christian character and is increasingly dominated by a damaging "multi-faithism." Far from heralding a tolerant pluralism, multifaithism turns out to be a cover for a coercive public secularism that is vulnerable to opponents of liberal democracy. One of his important articles, entitled "Breaking Faith with Britain," carries this subheading: "Christianity is central to British identity, but its marginalization has created a moral vacuum which radical Islam threatens to fill."[16]

Referring to England, Nazir-Ali writes, "The very idea of a unified people under God living in a 'golden chain' of social harmony has everything to do with the arrival and flourishing of Christianity."[17] The ceremonial public expression of this Christian character is seen, for example, in the established status of the Church of England, daily prayers in Parliament, and the national anthem. Such official forms, he says, "have the purpose of weaving the awareness of God into the body politic of the nation."[18] This Christian character has also shaped the nation from the bottom up, through the cumulative influence of biblical principles such as human dignity, conscience, consent, natural rights, equality, liberty, the common good, and—notably—hospitality to foreigners (his family comes from Pakistan). Severed from those biblical roots, these achievements become precarious: "The assumptions and values by which we live have been formed in the crucible of the Christian faith and its aftermath, the Enlightenment. This is

[16] Michael Nazir-Ali, "Breaking Faith with Britain," *Standpoint* 1 (2008): 45–47. See also Michael Nazir-Ali, *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), which contains "Breaking Faith." For a parallel Roman Catholic statement, see Aidan Nichols, "Christianity, Secularisation and Islam," *Standpoint* 2 (2008): 44–47.

[17] Nazir-Ali, "Breaking Faith," 45.

[18] Ibid.

the result of a quite specific history, and it is not at all necessary that such beliefs and values should arise in or survive in quite different contexts."[19] For example, he warns that, if the influence of non-Christian faiths, notably Islam, continues to grow, then, "instead of the Christian virtues of humility, service and sacrifice, there may be honour, [public] piety and the importance of 'saving face.'"[20] This last point may allude to practices such as "forced marriage" occurring among certain ethnic groups within the British Muslim community.[21]

Nazir-Ali concludes with a summons to Christians to regain their confidence in the gospel in public life:

> Christian faith has been central to the emergence of our nation and its development. We cannot really understand the nature and achievements of British society without reference to it. In a plural, multi-faith and multicultural society, it can still provide the resources for both supporting and providing a critique of public life in this country …. [Christian faith] is necessary to understand where we have come from, to guide us to where we are going, and to bring us back when we wander too from the path of national destiny.[22]

Nazir-Ali's account operates on the basis of an important assumption shared by many defenders of the Christian nation position but rarely made explicit or critically examined—the possibility of *national corporate religious agency*. The assumption is that "the nation" is a responsive, corporate entity that can be called to account for its spiritual direction so that a direct appeal can be made to the nation's government to uphold biblical or traditional Christian standards. This is the idea of a "faithful nation": a unified moral community capable of rendering political obedience to God, which may properly be called to account if it becomes unfaithful. This in turn is rooted in the Old Testament idea of the "covenanted nation," to which I return shortly.

The Christian nation position can be clarified by way of three further points. First, the idea of a *Christian nation* must be distinguished from that of a *Christian state*. Consider the following statement from The Christian Institute, a British Christian organization:

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[19] Ibid., 47.

[20] Ibid.

[21] The UK-based Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, however, asserts that such a practice is incompatible with Islam. See "Liberation from Forced Marriage," *Muslim Arbitration Tribunal*, 2008, http://www.matribunal.com/MAT_Forced_%20Marriage_%20Report. This underlines the importance of distinguishing religious diversity from cultural diversity.

[22] Nazir-Ali, "Breaking Faith," 47.

> When a state has a majority who claim allegiance to one religion, it may not enforce that one religious belief. There will, however, inevitably be a privileging of that religion at certain public ceremonies … [and in] education, while ensuring opt-outs for those of other faiths and none …. To fail to privilege one religion would be for the State positively to endorse either a secular humanistic philosophy … or a "multifaith philosophy" …. Currently Christianity is privileged in the United Kingdom where the majority claim a Christian allegiance ….The Christian Institute sees this as entirely appropriate ….[23]

This goes beyond the Christian nation view insofar as it explicitly defends the notion that the state may, or even must, offer to Christianity *public legal privilege*.[24] This idea is not strictly necessary to the Christian nation position, even though the two positions are often defended together (or, just as often, conflated). Nazir-Ali, however, envisages the possibility of defending the Christian character of the nation without at the same time depending on a privileged status for a church. Confessing his growing sense that Anglican establishment in England is less and less theologically meaningful, he cites the United States of America as an example of such a situation.[25] What this means is that, even in the absence of a constitutional preference for Christian faith, it is still possible to issue a public appeal to the nation as a corporate entity on the basis of Christian faith. While one can hold to a Christian nation stance without necessarily favoring a Christian state, it seems difficult to hold to a Christian state stance without also implying support for a Christian nation view.

We can draw a further distinction within the Christian state position between two possible ways in which the state might express its preference for the Christian faith. It might do so by sustaining an established church, as in England or Greece.[26] Or it might do so by including an explicit confession of faith in its constitution, as was the case in the Irish constitution of 1937, and, surprisingly, was done during the repatriation of the constitution in Canada in 1982 (to negligible effect). Such a position has been described by an American proponent as "National Confessionalism."[27] Versions of it

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[23] "Christianity and the State," *The Christian Institute*, 2008, https://www.christian.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-believe/christianity-and-the-state/.

[24] The statement also suggests that such privilege will be "inevitable" where Christians are in the majority. It does not make clear why that will be the case, and such a claim is not essential to the Christian state position.

[25] Nazi-Ali, "Breaking Faith," 47.

[26] For a sophisticated defense of English establishment, see Nigel Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2014), ch. 2.

[27] William Edgar, "The National Confessional Position," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 176–99. This book also contains statements of principled pluralism, "Christian America," and "Theonomy."

have been defended in the United Kingdom by Reformed theologians David Field and David McKay.[28] It is possible, of course, to advocate both establishment and a constitutional confession of faith.

The second clarification is that advocates of both Christian nation and Christian state positions are just as opposed to religious coercion and committed to religious liberty as are principled pluralists (as the statement from The Christian Institute makes clear). Nazir-Ali argues that religious liberty is itself a gift of the Christian faith and depends for its sustenance on the ongoing public influence of that faith. Whether or not that specific historical claim is valid, it is the case that a preferred or privileged public status for Christianity is compatible with extensive religious liberty for adherents of other faiths.[29]

The third clarification is that neither the Christian nation nor Christian state positions imply "theocracy." Theocracy literally means "the rule of God." But not even the ancient Israelite polity was a literal theocracy, since God's rule over politics was always mediated by some human officeholder, whether a Moses, a Samuel, or a David, whose task was to apply and interpret the law or implement other divine commands. The term is frequently used ignorantly, and sometimes mischievously, in public debates. What people really mean by it is the rule of the church or the clergy, which would be better termed "ecclesiocracy" or "clerocracy."[30] Christian nation or Christian state supporters do not advocate such arrangements.

To sum up: a Christian nation stance holds that the nation is an entity possessing corporate religious agency and that its government can thus be called to account by Christian citizens and churches for departing from Christian standards. A Christian state stance also argues that the government's upholding of such standards should include official recognition of the Christian faith, either by establishing a church or by confessing Christian faith in a constitution, or both.

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[28] David Field, "Samuel Rutherford and the Confessional Christian State," in *A Higher Throne: Evangelicals and Public Theology*, ed. Chris Green (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 85–12; David McKay, "The Crown Rights of King Jesus Today," in *Tales of Two Cities: Christianity and Politics*, ed. Stephen Clark (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 210–59.

[29] The claim is confirmed in Rex Adhar and Ian Leigh, *Religious Freedom in the Liberal State*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[30] Contemporary Iran would be a partial example, where a council of senior Islamic clerics functions as a kind of supreme court ensuring that legislation from the (democratically elected) parliament conforms to Islamic principles.

II. *The Principled Pluralist View*

A variety of theological considerations have been appealed to in support of principled pluralism (or variants of it). One approach proceeds from an Augustinian recognition of the limits of all earthly political orders—their incapacity in a fallen world to nurture faith (or virtue) in its citizens. This is the basis for the claim that states should, accordingly, refrain from endorsing religious confessions (or imposing particular moral codes).[31] Rowan Williams defends an approach somewhat like this, calling it "procedural secularism."[32] Roman Catholics find something like it implied in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, which appeals to a version of natural law.[33] The recent *American Charter of Freedom of Conscience* (2018), supported by Christians and many other people of faith, grounds it in the universal human propensity to search for truth and in the principle of religious liberty enshrined in the United States Constitution.[34] Other American writers such as Richard Mouw and James Skillen justify it in terms of the neo-Calvinist theory of "sphere sovereignty," which mandates a clear separation between the jurisdictions of church and state.[35] Scottish Reformed theologians also appeal to elements in the Calvinist tradition to articulate a similar stance.[36]

The political substance of the pluralist position is well expressed in *An Evangelical Manifesto*, an American statement issued in 2008. The *Manifesto* rejects what it calls the idea of a "sacred public square." Such a model "would continue to give a preferred place in public life to one religion which in almost all most current cases would be the Christian faith, but could equally be another faith." It goes on, "In a society as religiously diverse as America today, no one faith should be normative for the entire society, yet there should be room for the free expression of faith in the public

[31] See, e.g., Paul Helm, "An Augustinian Approach," in *Tales of Two Cities*, ed. Clark, 184–209.

[32] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), ch. 2. He distinguishes this from a "programmatic secularism" that seeks to impose a secularist worldview on society through the state. See also Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[33] Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis Humanae*, October 7, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

[34] http://www.americancharter.org/the-charter/.

[35] Skillen, *Recharging*; Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Stephen V. Monsma, *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); John Inazu, *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving through Deep Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[36] David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Doug Gay, *Honey from the Lion: Christianity and the Ethics of Nationalism* (London: SCM, 2013).

square." But the document also rejects a "naked public square," which "would make all religious expression inviolably private and keep the public square inviolably secular." It continues, "Nothing is more illiberal than to invite people into the public square but insist that they be stripped of the faith that makes them who they are and shapes the way they see the world." Over against both a sacred public square and a naked public square, the *Manifesto* advocates a "civil public square"—"a vision of public life in which citizens of all faiths are free to enter and engage the public square on the basis on their faith, but within a framework of what is agreed to be just and free for other faiths too." It adds, "Thus every right we assert for ourselves is at once a right we defend for others." I spell out the theology behind the principled pluralist position through a comparison with the Christian nation stance.[37]

III. *Theological Convergences*

In this section I identify seven core commitments which are, or could be, shared by adherents of both Christian nation and principled pluralist positions.

First, God is the sovereign governor and judge over the universe and over all nations. I mention this obvious point because it is important to note that principled pluralists do not suggest that it is because the state is outside the realm of divine sovereignty that diverse religious should be treated equally by the state; rather, they suggest equal treatment precisely because the state stands under that sovereignty. Equally, neither position needs to operate with a distinction, familiar in some strands of Protestant thought, between the sovereignty of God the Father and that of God the Son. They can affirm both that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to the ascended Christ (Matt 28:18–20) and that the kingdom of Christ embraces every dimension of reality, including the political realm.[38]

Second, as a result, governments and political leaders stand directly under the authority of Christ and are obliged to conduct their offices as his servants, ruling justly in all areas of governance. As a phrase drawn from Psalm 2 invoked by some Christian nation advocates has it, governments must "kiss the Son" (v. 12). They will be answerable to him for the discharge of their

[37] Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee, "An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment," Washington, DC, May 7, 2008, 16–17, cf. http://osguinness.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Evangelical-Manifesto-2.pdf.

[38] See James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

office at the final judgment but are also accountable in the present age, even if they do not know it. I mention this point because some Christian state supporters appeal to the distinctive Reformed notion of "the crown rights of King Jesus" as a basis for concluding that states should officially confess faith in Christ. However, the difference between them and principled pluralists is not over whether Jesus is sovereign over all nations but over how this sovereignty is mediated in the current dispensation—in "this age" (the *saeculum*) as distinct to "the age to come" (the *eschaton*).

Third, a biblical vision for political reform should be informed by both Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament contains a uniquely authoritative instantiation of God's political will for humanity in the polity of ancient Israel, and Christians should pay great regard to it. I say more on this below.

Fourth, Christians should work within available political structures to bend government and public policy into closer conformity to God's will for the state, opposing violations of that will and working for the public good of the nation. The health of the nation would be greatly improved if public policy were shaped powerfully by a biblically informed vision of politics.

Fifth, Christian citizens, and even some Christian officeholders, may, and sometimes should, express their demands on government in the language of biblical faith. They do not need to adopt a supposedly universal secular language to gain a legitimate hearing, though they will try to make themselves intelligible and persuasive in the context of a largely secularized and increasingly pluralized public realm.[39]

Sixth, the core principles on which a particular nation or state has historically been constructed may, as a matter of fact, have been deeply indebted to Christian influence. Christians need not apologize for or conceal this, although they will also humbly acknowledge that Christians have often contributed to profoundly unjust political deeds. A national constitution (or, indeed, that of the European Union) could legitimately acknowledge, as a matter of history and identity, the centrality of Christianity to the formation of the nation's political culture.

Seventh, where contemporary states have been substantially influenced by authentic Christian faith, Christians should work democratically to defend such influence where it exists and extend it where it does not. While the kingdom of Christ can never be fully present until the final judgment, its real impact can be visible in "signs of the Kingdom," already "between the times."[40]

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[39] See Jonathan Chaplin, *Talking God: The Legitimacy of Religious Public Reasoning* (London: Theos, 2008), https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/TalkingGod1.pdf.

[40] Some defenders of a Christian nation position seem to tend towards an "over-realized eschatology" at this point. David Field, however, argues this is not a necessary implication. "We

IV. *Theological Divergences*

The foregoing seven points amount to substantial areas of agreement. But the divergences remain theologically deep. While the Christian nation position holds that the nation's identity is essentially Christian or could become so—that it could indeed be a "faithful nation"—pluralists regard nations essentially as "communities of faith communities." As I will now explain, this is for fundamental "dispensational" reasons: the coming of Christ radically changes the place of nations in the divine economy of salvation.

Pluralists often begin their account by pointing out that the emergence of the church introduced into pagan Roman society an unprecedented institution proclaiming an authority higher than any human political order. Christians brought with them a compelling new loyalty that undermined the existing fusion of political and religious identities. As a result, as Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it, the church in any nation "cannot express the shared religious identity of [a whole] people, since there is no such identity …. Whenever the church enters a society, it destroys whatever religio-ethical unity that society may have possessed. Now there is only religious pluralism."[41]

Principled pluralists thus regard the state in the New Testament era as almost inevitably made up of many faith communities. At least wherever the church exists, there will never be a fully unifying public confession. Religious pluralism will be the default setting. The Old Testament command to rulers to subject themselves and their nation to the faith of Yahweh cannot be applied to rulers in the New Testament era. Pluralists argue that this conclusion is confirmed by the most important New Testament text on political authority, Romans 13. This speaks of rulers as "God's servant for your good" (v. 4 NRSV). While this has been invoked to justify an authoritarian conception of the state, it should be read as referring to the divinely appointed "office" of government with its limited duty to punish wrong and promote the good (i.e., to "administer justice"). It should not be seen as conferring

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want kings to bow down before Christ and nations to serve him; we want the nations streaming to Zion to learn the law of the Lord … we look forward to the growing empire of the Lord welcoming the bird-nations into its branches; to seeing the nations subdued and disciplined by the Gospel. None of us knows how far these things will be actualized before the return of Christ. All of us know that they will not be fully actualized before then" (Field, "Samuel Rutherford," 101). Later, however, Field adds: "A confessionally Christian state will not be established in England for hundreds of years, although we praise God for the possibility that we will see kings bowing down before the Lord Jesus in other countries before then" (106). That will strike principled pluralists (among others) as highly over-optimistic.

[41] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 123.

moral or spiritual legitimacy on any particular holders of that office, many of whom will abuse its terms of office scandalously.[42] The Roman government which Paul speaks of as God's servant not only did not confess Christ as Lord but openly rejected his rule, often persecuting his followers and at times ascribed to themselves quasi-divine status. Readings of Romans 13 today argue that Paul's language here is really a critique of Roman imperial rule, since by calling the Roman state a mere "servant" it radically deflates its hubristic pretensions.

The implication is that, from a Christian point of view, no nation can ever be "Christian" in the sense intended by Christian nation advocates. This in turn implies (although Paul himself did not have occasion to trace out the logic) that states should not take an official view of the truth of any one faith, but rather adopt a posture of even-handedness among the different faiths represented in their territory, securing public space for all. As *An Evangelical Manifesto* puts it, "no one faith should be normative for the entire society."[43] If this is so, then no appeal to government to protect the "Christian" identity of a nation can legitimately be made today. Christian nation advocates sometimes speak of this call for restraint as evidence of "failure of nerve" or as a "concession to secularism." Principled pluralists see it as a result of a proper theology of the religious limits of government.

Such a call for religious neutrality in no way implies that the state is *morally* neutral. Principled pluralists can agree that a "naked public square" is a myth. Any particular law or policy will inevitably reflect some substantive moral principle or other, or a combination of them; indeed, the overall design of the state may do so. Principled pluralists hold, however, that the required *unity of the state* is to be found not in a shared moral or religious vision, but rather in the more limited constitutional framework that structures it. Such a framework will embody a wide variety of institutions and practices, and Christians should strive to see that these are informed where possible by biblical notions of justice. Among them will be what *An Evangelical Manifesto* calls principles of justice and freedom for all faiths.[44]

It is true, as Nazir-Ali notes, that such a framework of constitutional justice cannot be sustained indefinitely without some substantive moral

[42] See Wolterstorff's exegesis of Romans 13 in ibid., ch. 8.

[43] Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee, "An Evangelical Manifesto," 16.

[44] I refer here to the unity of *the state*, a determinate institution. Because *the nation* is not such a determinate structure but a complex amalgam of multiple practices, mores, ethnic, linguistic and religious factors, its unity is much harder to identify, still less to protect. States may protect clearly identifiable aspects of national character such as language, landscape, or historic endowments but should not attempt to protect one ethnic, linguistic or religious community at the expense of others.

commitments on the part of citizens. These do need to be nurtured and shored up if the state is to remain capable of delivering justice over the long term. But against defenders of the Christian state, principled pluralists argue that such a project will not be advanced, and may even be hindered, by conferring official privilege on a particular faith. Against defenders of the Christian nation idea, they argue that it will not be advanced by issuing public appeals to the nation as if it were capable of responding in a unified way to biblical revelation—as if it could ever function as a "faithful nation." The longer-term task of nurturing the moral virtues needed to sustain the state falls instead to better-placed agents of formation in civil society, not least the churches.

To clarify the difference between principled pluralism and the Christian nation view further, let me dig deeper into the central assumption underlying the latter—the idea that a nation can exist as a unified moral community that can be held corporately accountable to God. This assumption derives from a particular reading of the relationship between the two testaments and the redemptive dispensations to which they bear witness, which pluralists question.

Let me first note that Christian nation advocates, like principled pluralists, do acknowledge important *discontinuities* between the testaments. For example, as noted, they do not think that the principle of compulsory national religious uniformity any longer applies, and they support religious liberty for all. Almost all adherents to the Christian nation view also agree that the state may not in any way disadvantage unbelievers civilly. They also acknowledge that the New Testament seems indirectly to assume the desirability of such civil liberty insofar as it attributes to government the role of establishing conditions in which the gospel may freely be preached (1 Pet 2:11–17). Finally, nor do (most) Christian nation advocates think that the specific injunctions of the criminal or civil law of the Old Testament remain valid as positive law for states in the New Testament era.[45] Instead, they tend to favor the principle stated in the Westminster Confession that it is not the specific commands of Mosaic law that are binding on Christians today but only "the general equity thereof"—that is, the enduring principles of justice underlying them.[46]

However, a key point of intertestamental *continuity* that Christian nation advocates assume is that nation-states in the New Testament era can and should display the unified moral and religious identity of the Old Testament

[45] This, however, is the case with the school known as "Theonomy." See Smith, *God and Politics*, Part One.

[46] See Harold Cunningham, "God's Law, 'General Equity' and the Westminster Confession of Faith," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58.2 (2007): 289–312.

polity. They therefore hold that it is meaningful to attribute to them the capacity to respond corporately and consciously to God (even if without coercing unbelievers). Ancient Israel certainly was such an entity. It was constituted and defined by a specific call of God to enter into a covenantal relationship, to obey and express his will in its social and political lives, and to be ordered by his revealed law.

But principled pluralists argue that *the place of nationhood in the divine economy changes radically under the new covenant*. Nations today are not the sorts of entities that are entitled corporately to embody or profess a particular religious faith. Pluralists hold that the specific, covenantal identity of biblical Israel was only ever ordained by God for one people at one time.[47] They do not deny that there may be generic features of nationhood exemplified in Israel from which important lessons must be learned by nations today—that nations should be humble, order their economic lives justly, affirm the family, care the environment, and so forth.[48] Precisely because the Israelite polity is a uniquely authoritative instantiation of God's political will for humanity, it must remain for Christians of "paradigmatic" significance, to invoke Christopher Wright's useful term.[49] Yet pluralists insist that, while everything in Old Testament law is *revelatory* of God's will, none of it is *binding* as positive law either for the people of God today or for the diverse states they happen to reside in.

Crucially, pluralists deny that God has anywhere *disclosed* that he has entered into a covenantal relationship with any nation other than biblical Israel, or that other nations are obliged, or even able, to reproduce or seek the unique covenantal relationship between God and Israel. They hold that, upon the inauguration of the new covenant, God no longer mediates his redemptive activity in the world via any special relationship with a particular nation or political order. Or, if he does, this activity belongs to the realm of providence, which remains inscrutable to us unless God specifically reveals it to us.[50] From Scripture we certainly do know generally that

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[47] They do not necessarily insist on the doctrine of supersessionism—the view that the biblical people of Israel has been superseded in God's plan of salvation and has no future in his eschatological future. That is a distinct question which has no implications for my argument. As it happens, I reject such a view.

[48] For wide-ranging assessments of how biblical law can speak authoritatively to Christians, and society, today, see Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004).

[49] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 62–75.

[50] The problems generated when the operations of "providence" are claimed to be visible in a particular nation are evident in Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

God orders all nations providentially according to his will, and specifically that in the time of biblical Israel he also chose to work through certain nations (Babylon) or rulers (Cyrus) as his appointed agents. But we know this only because it is revealed in Scripture, the canon of which is now closed. Apart from that there is no other way we could attain reliable knowledge of such things. Claims by contemporary "prophets" that God has revealed special callings for particular nations are to be treated with deep skepticism by the church.

Principled pluralists, then, hold that the Old Testament people of God played a dispensationally unique, unrepeatable, and inimitable role as a divinely established political community. This was the way God first chose to reveal himself to fallen humanity. But we should not suppose (and there is no biblical basis for supposing) that there was anything necessary about that choice, as if God were somehow bound to choose an entity called the "nation" as the conduit of his first revelation. Nor is there any biblical indication that this redemptive strategy was an anticipation of some general plan to go on working through covenanted nations in the future.[51]

This negative conclusion is reinforced by an equally important positive one. Not only are there no chosen nations today, but the New Testament people of God today was from the beginning essentially constituted as a transnational community. In Jesus Christ the Gentiles are, for the first time, brought fully into a covenant relationship with God; in Christ "there is no longer Jew nor Greek" (Gal 3:28 NRSV). This theological truth was enacted visibly in the multicultural character of the early church described in Acts and displayed dramatically at Pentecost. What Paul describes as the "mystery that … has now been revealed to his saints" (Col 1:26) is not some gnostic secret but rather a public declaration that the doors of salvation have been flung open to all nations. It had, of course, been God's original intention that Israel itself was to be a witness to all the nations, but for the most part it failed in that mission. Now, God's redemptive plan is publicly announced to the whole world and tangibly realized in the Messiah, who inaugurates a kingdom of global reach; hence the Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). The New Testament church, then, cannot literally be a "New Israel" in the sense of a territorial political community in which divine law prevails. Nor can biblical Israel be a model to be realized by Christians within the many diverse nations they now find themselves situated.

[51] Deuteronomy 7:7–8, for example, attributes God's choice of Israel entirely to his own sovereign elective will. It does not interpret it as a first instance of subsequent acts of election.

Conclusion

I have argued that, on the basis of a negative conclusion from the Old Testament and a positive one from the New Testament, there is no biblical warrant for holding that political nations today are capable of being addressed corporately by God as covenant partners (as the Christian nation view holds), or for attributing to them the explicit duty to confess faith in God that was imposed on Israel (as the Christian state position claims). The cumulative witness of Scripture and the historical experience of the church argue decisively for something like principled pluralism (whatever name we decide to give it). Under God today, states must establish public legal space for all faiths equally (within the limits of their mandate to secure public justice) and, as far as possible, facilitate the equal participation of such faiths in the public realm.

But let me close on a note of convergence. Christian nation supporters will, I hope, agree with principled pluralists that what truly pleases God most is not that states *officially declare* their support for Christian faith, but that they *act justly* in their concrete policies, especially towards the poor, the vulnerable, and the oppressed. The state's refraining from endorsing Christian faith does not amount to a rejection of the Lordship of Christ. Indeed, given a sufficiently large, faithful, informed and politically active Christian citizenry, the state will be submitting to Christ *in deeds of justice* even if not officially doing so *in words of faith*. That, surely, is far more important. And on that basis we can expect, and should work for, much practical agreement between adherents to the two positions, as all seek to bear witness in courageous and creative ways to God's coming kingdom within their political communities.

Sphere Sovereignty according to Kuyper

ANTONIUS STEVEN UN

Abstract

This article systematically describes the principle of sphere sovereignty according to Abraham Kuyper. Four themes are critically examined: the sovereignty of Christ as the main basis of Kuyper's principle and its relation to creation, fall, and redemption; structural pluralism as the way of understanding social structure; the notion of religious and confessional pluralism; finally, the role of the state as the sphere of spheres. A positive critique of Kuyper's principle is given in conclusion.

Keywords

Sphere sovereignty, sphere of spheres, structural pluralism, confessional pluralism, creation, fall, redemption, faith, public justice

Introduction

The principle of sphere sovereignty is most often associated with Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), though he was not the first thinker to entertain it. For instance, John Calvin (1509–1564), Johannes Althusius (1563–1638), and Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) had already thought of it, but Kuyper was the thinker who developed the idea to its most mature expression. Compared to van Prinsterer, for example, Kuyper expanded it beyond church-state

relations, bringing it into relation with other social institutions.[1] Kuyper popularized the idea in his speech "Sphere Sovereignty" at the establishment of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, in 1880. James Bratt considers it "the most memorable speech Abraham Kuyper delivered over a long lifetime of notable orations."[2] Kuyper also implemented the principle by starting and leading an ecclesiastical denomination, founding a political party through which he would become prime minister, and setting up newspapers. George Harinck, who certainly appreciates Kuyper's idea, concludes that it was not Kuyper's idea but his activities that had more impact and establish his legacy, which lives on in Dutch society.[3] "Kuyper was nothing," Craig Bartholomew writes, "if not culturally and socially engaged."[4] Among many of Kuyper's inspirational ideas, sphere sovereignty is the principle most discussed by theologians, political scientists, or ethicists in many countries in the West.[5]

I. *Christ as the Sovereign King*

The principle of sphere sovereignty rests in the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Kuyper defines sovereignty as "the authority that has the right, the duty, and the power to break and avenge all resistance to its will"[6] Kuyper distinguishes between sphere sovereignty and absolute sovereignty, which rests only in God. "If you believe in Him as Deviser and Creator, as Founder and Director of all things, your soul must also proclaim the Triune God as the only absolute Sovereign." The sovereignty of God "has been conferred absolute and undivided upon the man-Messiah." Christ is "the *Messiah*, the Anointed, and thus the *King* of kings possessing '*all* authority in heaven and on earth.'" Absolute sovereignty is authority and power "extending over all things visible and invisible, over the spiritual and the material."[7] The

[1] Johan D. Van der Vyver, "The Jurisprudential Legacy of Abraham Kuyper and Leo XIII," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 5.1 (2002): 213.

[2] James D. Bratt, "Sphere Sovereignty among Abraham Kuyper's Other Political Theories," in *The Kuyper Center Review: Politics, Religion, and Sphere Sovereignty*, ed. Gordon Graham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 34.

[3] George Harinck, "A Historian's Comment on the Use of Abraham Kuyper's Idea of Sphere Sovereignty," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 5.1 (2002): 277.

[4] Craig G. Bartholomew, Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition: A Systematic Introduction (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 131.

[5] Hak Joon Lee, "From Onto-Theology to Covenant: A Reconstruction of Abraham Kuyper's Theory of Sphere Sovereignty," in *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honor of Max L. Stackhouse*, ed. Deidre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2010), 87.

[6] Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 466.

[7] Ibid., 464, 466–68.

emphasis on Christ as king is important, compared to the view of liberal Christians, who favor the office of Christ as prophet, and that of pietists, who stress Jesus as "savior and healer of souls."[8] Kuyper fills a lacuna in the history of the Christian understanding of Christ.

That Christ is sovereign in heaven is evident, but Kuyper emphasizes three words in Matthew 28:18: "and on earth."[9] Govert Buijs writes, "Christ as (spiritual) King gathers on earth a people that is subject to him, is obedient to him. It is not an earthly people, and yet it is (also) a people on earth." Kuyper declares, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!'"[10] "The dominion of Jesus' kingship extends also to family, society, state, scholarship, art, and every other sphere of human activity."[11]

Christ as the sovereign king dominates all spheres of human life through the delegation of sovereignty to human beings. "Sovereignty rests in God," Kuyper says, "and can therefore proceed only from Him."[12] Christ has delegated his sovereignty "by dividing [our] life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty."[13] While Christ possesses absolute sovereignty, each sphere has a delegated sovereignty, and "human freedom is safe under this Son of Man anointed as Sovereign because, along with the State, every other sphere of life recognizes an authority derived from Him—that is, possesses sovereignty in its own sphere."[14] Since the state, with other sovereign spheres, receives sovereignty from Christ, the "perfect Sovereignty of the *sinless* Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among *sinful* men on earth."[15] The principle of sphere sovereignty rejects the Hegelian system of the state as "the immanent God."[16] "All authority of governments on earth originates from the sovereignty of God alone."[17] Sphere sovereignty also rejects the liberal system of Caesarism which derives from popular sovereignty. "Therefore in opposition both to the atheistic popular-sovereignty of the Encyclopedists, and the pantheistic

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[8] Clifford Anderson, introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham; Acton Institute, 2016), 1:xiv.

[9] Govert J. Buijs, introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham; Acton Institute, 2017), 2:xviii.

[10] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488.

[11] Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Bellingham, WA: Lexham; Acton Institute, 2016), 2:264.

[12] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

[13] Ibid., 467.

[14] Ibid., 468.

[15] Ibid., 467.

[16] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 466.

[17] Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 82.

state-sovereignty of German philosophers, the Calvinist maintains the Sovereignty of God, as the source of all authority among men."[18]

God delegates sovereignty to social spheres in the creation. The "second sovereignty," after the sovereignty of the state, is "implanted by God in the social spheres, in accordance with the ordinances of creation."[19] It is "in the order of creation, in the structure of human life; it was there before State sovereignty arose."[20] In *Our Program*, Kuyper explains how God delegates sovereignty to nature and to human beings. God has established the law of nature to exercise sovereignty over material objects, such as the strong over the weak.[21] The law of nature is also the authority in climate and soil over the world of plants, and in the animal world one may have authority over another. In our individual persons, there is a law that directs our blood and body, and the power of logic has authority over our judgments. The role of Christ is not as the founder but as the protector of sphere sovereignty.[22]

While affirming that sphere sovereignty is rooted in the order of creation, Kuyper says little about the basis for believing it.[23] Herman Bavinck tries to fill this gap:

> Everything was created with its own nature and is based on ordinances appointed by God for it. Sun and moon and stars have their own peculiar tasks; plants and animals and man have their own distinct natures. There is a rich diversity. But in this diversity, there is also a supreme unity. … Every creature received its own nature, its own life, and its own law of life.[24]

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[18] Ibid., 90.

[19] Ibid., 94.

[20] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 469.

[21] Abraham Kuyper, *Our Program*, trans. Harry van Dyke (Bellingham, WA: Lexham; Acton Institute, 2015), 20.

[22] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 469.

[23] Cf. Richard J. Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Whether the principle of sphere sovereignty is consistent with the biblical teaching and the Reformed tradition, Kuyper says, "Should anyone ask whether 'sphere sovereignty' is really derived from the heart of the Scripture and the treasury of Reformed life, I would entreat him first of all to plumb the depths of the organic *faith principle* in Scripture, further to note Hebron's tribal law for David's coronation, to notice Elijah's resistance to Ahab's tyranny, the disciples' refusal to yield to Jerusalem's police regulations, and, not least, to listen to their Lord's maxim concerning what is God's and what is Caesar's. As to Reformed life, don't you know about Calvin's 'lesser magistrates'? Isn't sphere sovereignty the basis of the entire Presbyterian church order? Did not almost all Reformed nations incline toward a confederative form of government? Are not civil liberties most luxuriantly developed in Reformed lands? Can it be denied that domestic peace, decentralization, and municipal autonomy are best guaranteed even today among the heirs of Calvin?" See Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 480–81.

[24] Quoted in Gordon Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 179–80.

In my opinion, both Kuyper and Bavinck ground sphere sovereignty on Genesis 1:11–12, on "each according to its kind." Sovereignty owned by each social sphere is given by God in the order of creation.

The human fall into sin destroys God's original design of sphere sovereignty. Firstly, sin brings an aspiration to uniformity into human life. Though "unity is the ultimate goal of all the ways of God,"[25] Kuyper still acknowledges the intrinsic difference of forms and configurations in life. Only God "one day" can and will "lead from all this diversity toward unity, out of this chaos toward order … all dissonances [resolving] into harmony." Alas, the world "in its sinful endeavor has arrogated this ideal for itself. The world, too, strives for unity." Worldly unity is "a false uniformity." In the "history of sin," human beings have tried to achieve false uniformity in "an imperial unity." Kuyper mentions some examples: Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, the Caesars of Rome, Louis XIV, Napoleon, and Otto von Bismarck, Kuyper's contemporary. False uniformity is a kind of "curse," since the imposition of uniformity eliminates diversity and destroys the richness of life.[26] The problem with imperial uniformity and centralism is the invasion of the state over other social spheres, violating Christ's absolute sovereignty and destroying sphere sovereignty. Thus Kuyper seeks to keep the state to its own sphere. Historically speaking, "State sovereignty recognized Sphere sovereignty as a permanent adversary, and within the spheres the power of resistance was weakened by the transgression of their own laws of being, that is, by sin." Imperial or dictatorial governments have invaded other social spheres in order to achieve their own political ambitions. "Hence also rises the danger that one sphere in life may encroach on its neighbor like a sticky wheel that shears off one cog after another until the whole operation is disrupted."[27] The final effect is that "the whole operation is disrupted."

Kuyper acknowledges the impact of sin in human social spheres. "Sin here also has exerted its disturbing influence and has distorted much which was intended for a blessing into a curse."[28] Thanks to common grace provided by God, this "fatal efficiency of sin has been stopped." Common grace not only negatively resists the destructive effects of sin but also positively endorses the development of civil good and righteousness.

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[25] Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 21.

[26] Ibid., 23, 32, 35.

[27] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.

[28] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 91.

Redemption by Christ has a cosmic scope in the restoration of sphere sovereignty. In Colossians 1:20 (ESV), Paul says, "… through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Christ's redemptive work is not restricted to the individual benefits of salvation from sin but extends to "the redemption *of the world*, and to the organic reunion of all things in heaven and on earth under Christ as their original head."[29] It "reestablishes the proper function of family, religious life, state, and all other institutions."[30] Christ works first as "the original Mediator of creation and after that also [as] the Mediator of redemption to make possible the enforcement and fulfillment of the decree of creation and everything entailed in it."[31] Sphere sovereignty, rooted in the order of creation of which Christ is mediator, is restored by Christ the mediator of redemption. Christ's redemptive work is also in "transforming the world, turning oppression into freedom, injustice into justice, hatred into love, oppressive swords into plowshares—although always partly and provisionally."[32] Christians should not be silent about social injustices in which "God's original intention for his creation is violated," but should enter the fallen world to develop each social sphere according to its nature and make human life flourish. Each social sphere is ontologically related within a structural pluralism.

II. *The Principle of Structural Pluralism*

Structural pluralism means that "God has created the world with various structures … which order life and coordinate human interaction."[33] These include family, government, church, school, and so forth. This term correctly describes the principle of sphere sovereignty. Kuyper believed that "Our human life, with its visible material foreground and invisible spiritual background, is neither simple nor uniform but constitutes an infinitely complex organism." This complexity "is so structured that the individual exists only in groups." The parts of this complex organism are "'cogwheels,' spring-driven on their own axles, or 'spheres,' each animated with its own

[29] Ibid., 119.

[30] Corwin Smidt, "The Principled Pluralist Perspective," in *Church, State, and Public Justice: Five Views*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 133.

[31] Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 185.

[32] Buijs, introduction, xxvi.

[33] Gordon Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*, ed. Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 79.

spirit." Kuyper gives some examples of these cogwheels or spheres: the scientific world, the business world, the art world, ecclesiastical life; each "comprises its own *domain*. … Each has its own Sovereign within its bounds." Each sphere "obeys its own laws of life, each subject to its own chief."[34] They "do not owe their existence to the state, and do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does." There is an authority within each sphere to which the rest is subjected, and nothing outside can posit a place inside a sphere except God himself.[35] Gordon Spykman comments, "Each sphere has its own identity, its own unique task, its own God-given prerogatives. On each God has conferred its own peculiar right of existence and reason for existence."[36]

Kuyper differentiates between the mechanical character of the state and the organic character of the society. Whatever human beings receive directly from creation is organically and spontaneously developed, as illustrated by the family with its blood relationship. Government is directly appointed by God and does not have "a natural head, which organically grew from the body of the people, but a *mechanical* head, which from without has been placed upon the trunk of the nation."[37] The organic character, on the other hand, develops spontaneously "not by the law of inheritance or by appointment, but only by the grace of God." Kuyper gives some examples. In the sphere of science or art a genius or maestro receives capability by the grace of God, and "is subject to no one and is responsible to Him alone Who has granted this ascendancy," and will "rule over all and in the end receive from all the homage."[38] Kuyper's doctrine of common grace comes to play on the main stage, as an abundant grace upon persons, an authority delegated by the sovereign Lord. The sphere is sovereign, since it obeys its own laws of life, subject to its own authority.

Each sphere has its own laws of life and its own authority; they are not independent of each other but related. As parts of a complex organism "the cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life."[39] Each sphere may enrich others and finally enrich human life. A family that

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[34] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467.
[35] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 90–91.
[36] Spykman, "Sphere Sovereignty," 167.
[37] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 92–93.
[38] Ibid., 95.
[39] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467–68.

functions well provides its members with spiritual, psychological, and physical readiness and maturity for engagement in other spheres: business, art, religion, science, and so forth.[40] Therefore the principle of sphere sovereignty, also called "principled pluralism," proposes that human beings live within—borrowing Spykman's expression—"a network of divinely ordained life-relationship."[41] People fulfill their callings in "the plurality of communal associations," rather than receiving meaning from a collectivist megastructure institution, a "central bureaucratic seat of authority," or by autonomous sovereign individuality.[42] Sphere sovereignty or principled pluralism affirms the vital role of communities in a healthy society and distances itself from both laissez-faire liberalism and socialist or nationalist collectivism.[43]

Structural pluralism is "normative" since each sphere is a part of the original order of creation.[44] Thus, the principle of sphere sovereignty endorses structural pluralism as something "good."[45] This normative good exists because it is established by God, but also because it functions for empowering mediating structures, "those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life."[46] These are essential in assisting the "megastructures" of societal life to work for human flourishing. Referring to Peter Berger, Richard Mouw writes, "States and corporations need to look 'below' themselves for 'moral sustenance,' providing room for the significant influence of those 'living subcultures from which people derive meaning and identity.'" Kuyper's principle of sphere sovereignty, however, goes beyond the present-day discussion on mediating structures. Mouw adds, "Kuyper is not merely interested in strengthening mediating structures; he also wants to understand that these so-called mediating structures are themselves organizational manifestations of more basic spheres of interaction."[47]

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[40] Kent A. Van Til, "Abraham Kuyper and Michael Walzer: The Justice of the Spheres," *Calvin Theological Journal* 40.2 (November 2005): 274.

[41] Spykman, "Principled," 79.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Smidt, "Principled," 140.

[44] Benyamin F. Intan, "Religious Freedom and the Pancasila-Based State of Indonesia: A Neo-Calvinist Idea of Principled Pluralism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 54.1 (2019): 64.

[45] Smidt, "Principled," 137.

[46] Peter L. Berger and Richard J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, 1977), 158.

[47] Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 37.

III. *The Principle of Confessional Pluralism*

Confessional pluralism refers to "the right of the various religious groups that make up a society to develop their own patterns of involvement in public life through their own associations—schools, political parties, labor unions, churches, and so on—to promote their views."[48] Kuyper affirms confessional pluralism in several ways. Firstly, his notion of Christ's kingship and the eschatological unity: the true unity of all creatures or all human beings will be accomplished by Christ at the end of the history. In maintaining freedom of conscience, Kuyper endorses avoiding "*coercion* in all spiritual matters" and replacing it with "persuasion."[49] Coercion on religious matters, for Kuyper, is Christ's eschatological prerogative: "Someday there will be coercion, when Christ descends in majesty from the heavens, breaks the anti-Christian powers with a rod of iron …. He has a right to this because he knows the hearts of all and will be the judge of all. But *we do not*. To us it is only given to fight with spiritual weapons and to bear our cross in joyful discipleship."[50] Kuyper encourages us to accept "the position of equality before the law" with those who hold a different worldview. Recalling van Prinsterer's thinking, he asks for a guarantee of constitutional liberty for the performance of religious duty by citizens. It means, as indicated by Spykman, the state must secure freedom of religion for all citizens. The tolerance based on Christ role is "eschatological tolerance."[51] Jesus's parable in Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 shows the antithesis of "good seed" and "weeds" which "both grow until the harvest" (v. 30). Jesus explains the meaning of the parable, "The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age" (vv. 39–40). It is not our task to deal with "the weeds" in the here and now.

Going from the eschatological fulfillment of Christ's kingship to the alpha point, God created human beings with religious sense. Following Calvin, Kuyper believed that all human beings are "by nature 'incurably religious.'"[52] "If faith is to be a human reality in the regenerate, it must be an attitude (habitus) of our human nature as such; consequently it must have been present in the first man; and it must still be discernible in the sinner."[53] We

[48] Spykman, "Principled," 79.
[49] Abraham Kuyper, "Maranatha," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 219–20.
[50] Ibid., 220 (emphasis added).
[51] Spykman, "Principled," 85–86.
[52] Ibid., 81.
[53] Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1898), 266.

can see in human beings what Kuyper calls "ethical powers" and "the pistic element," however private and sinful.[54] Every person unavoidably owns faith: "Every act of thought or observation … can only be established in us by faith," and "human intercourse is founded" upon it.[55] He adds, "All knowledge proceeds from faith of whatever kind" and "Faith consecrates [a person] in the depths of his being." He concludes, "The person who does not believe, does not exist."[56] Nor is faith an abstract set of philosophical presuppositions.[57] "He who cleaves to something holds himself fast to it, leans upon and trusts in it."[58] The notion of holding, leaning, and trusting indicates that for Kuyper, faith is "a deeply intimate, relational, and even mystical" dependency on something.[59] Since faith "is and will always be the expression of what is central in our lives,"[60] it is a violation of human rights if the state does not provide freedom of religion, including the freedom to express religion in some social spheres.

Matthew Kaemingk considers that Kuyper is criticizing the modern claim to religious neutrality, and Nicholas Wolterstorff notes that he is "'challenging the Lockean model' of the liberal public square 'at its very foundation.'"[61] For Kuyper, modern liberals who label themselves nonreligious or secular are religious. "However much they rage against dogmas, they are themselves *the most stubborn dogmatists*. A dogma, after all, is a proposition that you want others to accept on pain of being proven wrong."[62] Their dogma, "the modern worldview," is taught through "the Catechism of Rousseau and Darwin."[63] Kuyper mentions the presence of "doctrinaire democrats" who hold to a system which is "the logical consequence of the Revolution principle of utter self-sufficiency." He calls to our attention the presence of

[54] In his lecture "Calvinism and Science," Kuyper shows the important role of faith. He says, "Every science presupposes faith in self, in our self-consciousness; presupposes faith in the accurate working of our senses; presupposes faith in the correctness of the laws of thought; presupposes faith in something universal hidden behind the special phenomena; presupposes faith in life; and especially presupposes faith in the principles, from which we proceed; which signifies that all these indispensable axioms, needed in a productive scientific investigation, do not come to us by proof, but are established in our judgment by our inner conception and *given with our self-consciousness*." See Kuyper, *Lectures*, 131.

[55] Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 132, 134.

[56] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467, 486.

[57] Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 95.

[58] Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 128.

[59] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 95.

[60] Kuyper, "Common Grace," 198.

[61] Quoted in Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 97.

[62] Abraham Kuyper, "Modernism: A *Fata Morgana* in the Christian Domain," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 115 (emphasis added).

[63] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 189.

"the sectarian school of the modernists," "a counter church."[64] If liberals or modernists use the public sphere to share their worldview and have their own social institutions, they are religious and like all religions must benefit from the opportunities of the public sphere.

If human beings cannot live without faith or religion, many worldviews or religious expressions in the public sphere can logically coexist. Kuyper does not want to deny the diversity of faith in the world, but that does not mean that he "celebrates" it. He thanks God for many types of diversity, including in Christian churches, but does not thank God for the diversity of religious beliefs.[65] In more contemporary language, "Confessional pluralism simply reflects the recognition that it is not the function of the state to discern the ultimate truth for those under its rule. This recognition of confessional pluralism does not, for principled pluralists, constitute *an acceptance of relativism.*"[66] Though Kuyper does not celebrate religious relativism, it does not imply that he encourages the government to defend sound doctrine. Here, Kuyper does not agree with Calvin or with article 36 of the Belgic Confession.[67] Though Calvin does not want to surrender the right to decide the matters of religion to the civil government, he encourages civil government "to defend the sound doctrine of piety."[68] Here, government is called to protect right doctrine and punish those who violate it. In his address *Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberty*, Kuyper affirms that "it was [Calvin's] position that no heresy be tolerated on major points of the Christian confessions but that deviations on minor matters had to be tolerated." Thus, though Calvin did not tolerate heresy as deviation from major doctrines, there have been many variations since then, by the Huguenots, the Dutch republicans, and the American constitutions.[69] Kuyper certainly affirms Calvinism's contribution to freedom of conscience.[70]

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[64] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 191–93.

[65] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 102–3.

[66] Smidt, "Principled," 139 (emphasis added).

[67] Ibid., 135. Part of article 36 of the Belgic Confession reads, "And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word."

[68] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 4.20.3–2.

[69] Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 304–5.

[70] Kuyper certainly disagrees with elements of article 36 of the Belgic Confession. In 1905, Kuyper had some words removed from his church's confession and the article amended. Kuyper, *Our Program*, 64, n. 8.

That Kuyper's attitude does not celebrate the diversity of religious faith is shown by his notion of antithesis between sinners and believers. "The faith life of the sinner is turned away from God in ἀπιστία and attaches itself to something creaturely, in which it seeks support against God." The believer's faith, "which was originally directed only to the manifestation of God in the soul, was now to be directed to the manifestation of God in the flesh, and thus become faith in Christ."[71] Kuyper also describes the antithesis between evolution as a worldview and Christianity.[72] "The Antithesis is present in our science and our art, in our jurisprudence and our pedagogy. It penetrates everything; everywhere it asserts itself in two directions."[73] Thus, instead of prescribing the pluralism of faith, Kuyper says, "Ideological fragmentation and division is simply the reality of life lived after the fall into sin."[74] The conviction of Christ's authority until eschatological unity allowed Kuyper to cooperate with other religious politicians (such as the Roman Catholic Herman Schaepman [1844–1903]). Collaboration not only can achieve some political ends but also may "avert much evil." "Excessive divisions weaken and fragment our national strength."[75] Instead of antithesis, political coalitions might be built on the basis of God's common grace. Bratt explains Kuyper's reason for developing this doctrine in *De Heraut* over six years: "Faith-based politics [seeks] common ground with people of fundamentally different convictions—at least to establish mutual intelligibility and respect for the rules of the game, and at most to build coalitions on issues of common interest."[76]

Confessional pluralism does not simply recognize the unavoidable diversity of religions in the present world but also affirms the public nature of religions. Kuyper believes that "every kind of faith has in itself an impulse to speak out"[77] and encourages integrity in thought, speech, and deed, both in private and in public life: "You cannot be a human of one piece, a person of character and intelligence, and still allow yourself to be tempted to split

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[71] Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, 280–81.

[72] Kuyper says, "Evolution is a newly conceived system, a newly established theory, a newly formed dogma, a newly emerged faith. Embracing and dominating all of life, it is diametrically opposed to the Christian faith and can erect its temple only upon the ruins of our Christian Confession." Abraham Kuyper, "Evolution," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. Bratt, 439, cf. 429–30; see also Bartholomew, *Contours*, 25.

[73] Abraham Kuyper, "Kuyper on Coalitions and Antithesis (1909)," trans. Harry van Dyke, All of Life Redeemed, https://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Kuyper/AK-CoalitionsAntithesis.pdf, 11–18.

[74] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 103.

[75] Kuyper, "Coalitions," 11–18.

[76] James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 198.

[77] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 131.

your conscience in two, professing your God in one half and in the other half bowing before laws that have nothing to do with him. That does not comport with reason nor does it square with your conscience."[78] So "to ask a Christian to privatize his or her faith and behave like a liberal in the public square was no minor request; for Kuyper it was a command to convert."[79] Kuyper emphasizes that "whatever you may choose, whatever you are … you have to be it consistently … in your entire world- and life-view; in the full reflection of the whole world-picture from the mirror of your human consciousness."[80] He envisions "a diverse public square in which faiths could advocate for their convictions, could build their institutions, and could live out their unique cultural practices."[81]

IV. *The State as the Sphere of Spheres*

The principle of sphere sovereignty posits the state in its own place, occupying its own sphere without invading others. Kuyper encourages the state to become "the sphere of spheres."[82] He emphasizes that "in a nobler sense, not for itself but on behalf of the other spheres, it seeks to strengthen its arm and with that outstretched arm to resist, to try to break, any sphere's drive to expand and dominate a wider domain." In more detail, he explains later that the state has three main functions.[83] The first is whenever "different spheres clash, to compel mutual regard for the boundary-lines of each." The second is to "defend individuals and the weak ones, in those spheres, against the abuse of power of the rest." The third is to "coerce all together to bear personal and financial burdens for the maintenance of the natural unity of the State." The state plays a vital role in maintaining the principle of sphere sovereignty, that each sphere occupy its own place, that authority in each sphere be not abusive within the sphere, and that each sphere be involved in maintaining the natural unity of the state. In Mouw's words, the first is "the adjudication of intersphere boundary disputes"; the second is about the "intrasphere conflict"; the third is on the "transpherical patterns."[84] Regarding the first, the state "must provide for sound mutual interaction among the various spheres, insofar as they are externally manifest, and keep

[78] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 31.
[79] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 114.
[80] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 134.
[81] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 114.
[82] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 472.
[83] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 97.
[84] Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 36.

them within just limits." In the second, because of sin, "personal life can be suppressed by the group in which one lives, the state must protect the individual from the tyranny of his own circle."[85] In the third, we can mention an example as simple as "roads," which "are used to conduct the affairs of many spheres."[86] The state assures an individual's constitutional liberty and that he or she may not be forced to join or to withdraw from an association.[87] In short, the state has to fulfill the task of "promoting public justice between the communities."[88] Public justice is the "enforcement of the fulfilment of public offices and the protection of persons and groups from interference from others."[89] Referring to Proverbs 29:4, Kuyper argues that the state has the task of giving "stability to the land by justice"[90] as "the administrator of public justice and righteousness."[91] Referring to Psalms 72 and 82, Spykman stresses the function of the state in Kuyper as "the public defender of the powerless." The righteous and just God favors the poor and the weak not because they are "better" or holier than the rich but, as the Bible often shows, because they are "the victims of injustice and unrighteous discrimination."[92] This is the state's main task regarding structural pluralism, but it also secures confessional pluralism, in the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in civil society and the public sphere.

To perform this glorious task, Kuyper proposes a suitable constitution: "Here exactly lies the starting-point for that cooperation of the sovereignty of the government, with the sovereignty in the social sphere, which finds its regulation in the Constitution." The constitution or "the Law has to indicate the rights of each, and the rights of the citizens over their own purses must remain the invincible bulwark against the abuse of power on the part of the government." Kuyper also considers that the representative system promotes sphere sovereignty: "It remains the duty of those Assemblies [or the general house of representatives] to maintain the popular rights and liberties, of all and in the name of all, *with* and if need be *against* the government."[93] Regarding the funding of civil society, Kuyper was once against state funding. He anticipated the influence of money on power. "Money creates power *for*

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[85] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468. See also Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 130.
[86] Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 36.
[87] Kuyper, *Our Program*, 158.
[88] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 129; Bartholomew, *Contours*, 139.
[89] Timothy Keene, "Kuyper and Dooyeweerd: Sphere Sovereignty and Modal Aspects," *Transformation* 3.1 (2016): 74.
[90] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 468.
[91] Spykman, "Principled," 87.
[92] Ibid., 87–88.
[93] Kuyper, *Lectures*, 97.

the one who gives *over* the one who receives."[94] Later, he modified his position regarding state funding in civil society. Without discriminating between religious worldviews or imposing an ideology, the state guarantees access to social services, education, and health care.[95]

V. *Critical Assessment*

Now to some critical comments on sphere sovereignty. In general, Kuyper lacks what Buijs calls "the art of discernment." Though affirming that the fundamental framework is "still highly relevant and basically sound," Buijs recognizes the lack of "self-examination and self-critique and … humility as well."[96] This problem was also pointed out by Rob Woltjer, who said at Kuyper's funeral, "For the official academic world Kuyper has been more an object of study than a subject. … He was never taken seriously as an academic."[97] That is why, unlike his colleague Bavinck, Kuyper was never elected a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. Buijs then suggests that Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) was "undoubtedly Kuyper's most gifted intellectual successor." Dooyeweerd "set out to develop a much more sophisticated and self-critical art of discernment, entering into a critical dialogue with both contemporary philosophy and a wide range of empirical sciences, in order to discover some universal principles that perhaps can be called 'creational.'"[98]

One of Kuyper's problems of definition concerns the meaning and nature of what he meant by creational spheres. Mouw mentions how "navigation" and "agriculture" are considered spheres at the same level as science, art, or the family.[99] Buijs has also mentioned the "moral world"[100] and how to make a case for its institutional authority. In Bartholomew's words, "Another issue that needs clarification is the precise nature of a sphere and the number of spheres."[101] With a very dense schedule and work load, Kuyper understandably lacked precision.

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[94] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 478.

[95] Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality*, 131.

[96] Buijs, introduction, xxix.

[97] Quoted in Harinck, "Historian's Comment," 277. Rob Woltjer (1878–1955) was a lecturer at the Vrije Universiteit.

[98] Buijs, introduction, xxxi.

[99] Mouw, *Cultural Discipleship*, 38; see also Kuyper, *Lectures*, 96.

[100] I owe this insight to a personal discussion with Govert Buijs. Cf. Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 467.

[101] Bartholomew, *Contours*, 157.

The very idea of sphere sovereignty, however, still has much to offer. Historically speaking, the inaugural speech, "Sphere Sovereignty," with its context and purpose, was inspirational; as Bratt points out, it was "a heroic narrative of world history" and "an alternative model of perception and interpretation." Kuyper inspired many people, including Dooyeweerd, who would later develop his principle into a more systematic and sophisticated philosophy of reality and society. As narrative, the speech contained some "ultimate values." As epistemology, it provided a rich articulation, "being embedded in cultural or social psychological context." Despite its inspirational, heroic, and alternative mold, however, Bratt finds that it gave "very modest biblical evidence and a minimum of theological elaboration."[102] As Mouw indicates, not only was there a lack of precision then, but Kuyper did not clarify his definition even in his lectures delivered eighteen years later. This lacuna opened a space for Dooyeweerd's elaboration.

Dooyeweerd truly appreciated Kuyper's principle of sphere sovereignty. Compared to van Prinsterer's historicism, Kuyper consistently held up the scriptural, creational principle. For Dooyeweerd, Kuyper was influenced by historicism mainly in putting municipalities and provinces found in Dutch history in the general list, along with the family, school, art, and so forth. Dooyeweerd moved beyond Kuyper to differentiate between the principle of whole and part and the principle of sphere sovereignty. He understood municipalities and provinces to be "truly 'autonomous' parts of the state." As the parts of the state, their authority is delegated by the whole (the state). While the autonomy of the parts depends on "the requirements of the whole," sphere sovereignty "is rooted in the constant, inherent character of the life sphere itself."[103] By differentiating between the principle of the whole and part and the principle of sphere sovereignty, Dooyeweerd clarified the meaning of the notion "sphere," excluding municipalities and provinces.

According to James Skillen and Rockne McCarthy, Dooyeweerd provides a further substantial development for the principle of sphere sovereignty with the idea of double horizons in "creation's ontic structure," namely, "the identity structure of social reality" and "the modal structure of reality."[104] Modal aspects consist of "number, space, motion, organic life, emotional feeling, logical distinction, historical development of culture, symbolic

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[102] Bratt, "Sphere Sovereignty," 35, 41; see also Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist*, 133.

[103] Herman Dooyeweerd, "Roots of Western Culture," in *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*, ed. James W. Skillen and Rockne M. McCarthy (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 289–90.

[104] Skillen and McCarthy, *Political Order*, 403–4.

signification, social interaction, economic value, aesthetic harmony, law, moral valuation, and certainty of faith."[105] Each social institution or association (the first horizon) has its own qualifying aspect (the second horizon). The sovereignty of each social institution comprises its own qualifying aspect.[106] For example, the family is "qualified" distinctively from the state or a business company in its normative existence as "a community of kinship love." Thus, each social institution or association has its own "ontological identity."[107] There are three important elements in Dooyeweerd's philosophy of social ontology: "the mutual irreducibility, inner connection, and inseparable coherence of all the aspects of reality in the order of time." He adds,

> While this aspect is irreducible to the others, sovereign in its own sphere, and subject to its own sphere of divine laws (the laws for logical thought), it nevertheless reveals its internal nature and its conformity to law only in an unbreakable coherence with all the other aspects of reality.

The "universal coherence and inter-connection" is called "sphere universality."[108]

The notion of a qualifying aspect that is irreducible for each social institution provides a more systematic and more sophisticated way of understanding the meaning of "sphere" in the principle of sphere sovereignty. Therefore, the main task of the so-called "megastructures," such as the state, the church, and the market, is in avoiding conflation of social structures and rather recognizing and respecting the structural integrity of each social sphere. Since each social institution has its own irreducible, ontological identity, social structures stand in "a coordinate relationship to each other." Jonathan Chaplin draws a consequence: there is no one institution that has a "superior value" compared to other institutions, and no institution is more perfect than others. "All are equally dignified expressions of the divine purpose for human society," and, as Chaplin comments, "we might say that all have a 'divine right' to exist and flourish."[109]

The meaning of a sovereign sphere in Dooyeweerdian thought furthers and clarifies the Kuyperian scheme. The coordinate relationships in

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[105] Dooyeweerd, "Roots of Western Culture," 278.

[106] Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 145.

[107] Skillen and McCarthy, *Political Order*, 404–5.

[108] Dooyeweerd, "Roots of Western Culture," 281, 282–83.

[109] Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd*, 144, 146.

Dooyeweerd's thinking constitute "enkaptic interlacements"[110]—pervasive relationships in society aimed at mapping structural coherence among distinct institutions. In an enkaptic interlacement, the relation between two independent social institutions with different qualifying functions does not imply the absorption of internal structures. In other words, in an enkaptic interlacement, each institution preserves its own sphere sovereignty. An enkaptic interlacement also possesses what Chaplin calls a "functional subservience." Functional subservience is the respect for other institutions' sovereignty or qualifying functions.

Here, in my view, the meaning of a sovereign sphere is clarified. In the Dooyeweerdian vocabulary, each sphere has its own qualifying function, which is irreducible and distinct from others, and is irreducible to others but can be subservient to them in a certain sense, in enkaptic interlacements.

[110] Ibid., 67–70.

Bavinck as Public Theologian: Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics

CORY C. BROCK

Abstract

As a result of the Enlightenment, the privatization of religion, and the dissociation of theology and the university, public theology has become a very pertinent topic. While public theology emerged as a discipline in the 1980s, the neo-Calvinist tradition, led by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, was engaged in public-theological reasoning long before. Although not using the expression *public theology*, Bavinck offers a public theology in multiple ways. For him, it is a theology for and of the church. His main contribution, however, lies in his philosophical works, where he brings theo-logic to bear on the questions facing the various publics. Addressing current events, he sought to give answers founded on the Triune God. His essay "Ethics and Politics," written during the Great War, is a primary example.

Keywords

Herman Bavinck, neo-Calvinism, public theology, philosophy, ethics, politics

In his 1998 article, "The Emptiness of Theology," Richard Dawkins drew a sharp dichotomy between theological gesture and scientific knowledge: "What has 'theology' ever said that is the smallest use to anybody? When has 'theology' ever said anything that is demonstrably true and not obvious? What makes you think 'theology' is a subject at all?"[1] Indeed, under such Kantian dichotomies in the modern West, is theology useful to anybody?

In the 1980s, to combat two centuries of the effects of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment)—namely, the privatization of theological speech—the counter-discipline called public theology officially arose under the leadership of theologians such as David Tracy to address questions such as these.[2] Yet the legacy of modern reflection on religion and theology for social teaching precedes the development of the contemporary discipline of public theology by more than a century. Consider two 1891 publications: Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, written for the sake of the working class,[3] and Abraham Kuyper's *De Sociale Vraagstuk en de Christelijke Religie* (The Social Problem and the Christian Religion), wherein Kuyper called the Christian church to action in the face of the developing plight of the poor.[4]

The broad topic of this essay is Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) on public theology with particular attention to his 1916 essay "Ethics and Politics" (*Ethiek en politiek*). "Ethics and Politics" is a primary example of Bavinck's mature reflections on moral and social ignorance under the errors of modernism disciplined by attention to moral philosophy. Kuyper and Bavinck were the public leadership and theological voice of the first-generation neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands. What has now become known as the neo-Calvinist or Kuyperian tradition is perhaps most famous for its "public theology," an anachronism applied to a theological and confessional movement that did indeed bring the light of Christian dogmatics to bear on the possibility of the common good. Yet, asking the question of public theology while facing Bavinck's corpus gives rise to several problems.

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[1] Richard Dawkins, "The Emptiness of Theology," *Free Inquiry Magazine* 18.2 (1998).

[2] In the course of defining this discipline, David Tracy's reflections on public theology in *The Analogical Imagination* are a prominent monument along the way. Tracy argues for three distinct "publics" the theologian must speak to: society, academy, and church. For Tracy, because theology is a discipline that is intended to answer questions humans are asking, it must take up the questions of each of the domains of the human publics. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1998).

[3] *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII on the Condition of Labor* (New York: Paulist, 1940).

[4] Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1998).

First, nowhere in Bavinck's (or Kuyper's) corpus can one locate a reference to the phrase *public theology* or the distinct discipline. Second, the Kuyperian tradition of public theology is largely a development of Kuyper's social teaching (and this is well documented in the history of the scholarship being advanced from Kuyper's works like *Ons Program* and *Pro Rege*).[5] Under Kuyper's legacy, a neo-Calvinist public theological concept has developed that one may define generally as the call for a public Christian witness among all the various publics of the *saeculum*. And while Bavinck is known for his public-theological concept of the organic church as "leaven," the mention of public theology gives rise to a question that can be applied to his broader corpus: did Bavinck do (or develop) a systematic public theology beyond the concept of the church as leaven?

Indeed, he did. His most significant contribution to this effort is that in his role as public theologian he offered to various publics a genealogy of the timeless. He taught wide audiences the origin and ground of its prized institutions and primordial desires: the being of the Triune God.

To develop this point, we shall first consider what the term *public* does to the discipline of theology, and particularly so under Bavinck's understanding of the nature and task of theology. Derivatively, this essay argues that the premiere example of Bavinck as public theologian is his work as a philosopher, which for him is an implication of the second task of dogmatics. Finally, we shall consider his essay "Ethics and Politics" as an example and case study of his public-theological method and reasoning.

I. *Theology and Public Theology*

Bavinck defined theology in a manner similar to that of the majority of the Christian theological tradition: theology is the science concerning God

[5] See, for example, Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005). Therein, Bacote connects the work of the Holy Spirit in the created order ("cosmic pneumatology") with Abraham Kuyper's "public theology." He argues that the fact of the Spirit's preserving presence in the created world ought to and must prompt human stewardship or a preserving presence in the public sphere. Since history is the horizon of human activity, culture and politics are "manifestations of stewardship of the biophysical creation." The cultural mandate suggests the earth is intended and prepared for the process of development in the form of human flourishing in a social order, in cultural expression, and political involvement (18). Also, the recent translation and publication of Kuyper's works by Lexham, *Collected Works in Public Theology*, features his works on common grace, science, scholarship, and art, as well as on Christ's Kingship and its implications (*Pro Rege*), on Islam, on justice, and the political (*Ons Program)*.

(*scientia de Deo*).[6] The focus of this definition is on God. God is the object of theology—the theologian seeks to know God through God's self-revelation or to "think God's thoughts after him."[7] The authority of dogmatic theological speech is not in the church or the theologian but in the fact that God has spoken, *Deus dixit*.[8] Bavinck's definition, written definitively in his 1890s *Dogmatics*, was intended to demarcate theologies of consciousness or philosophies of religion from the science of *theologia*, the knowledge of the Triune God and, subsequently, of all things related to God.[9]

If theology were instead a study of human consciousness, theology's object would be the people of God and their collective religious consciousness. Here, theology asks, What do the *people* believe concerning Jesus Christ of Nazareth today and in the light of history? If theology were a philosophy of religion, it would primarily include a study of religion in general, weighing both the consciousness of believers and the practices of religion—a sociology. Bavinck upheld the longstanding practice that dogmatic (or systematic) theology is faith seeking understanding where Spirit-wrought piety directs the heart and mind toward the meticulous and prayerful task of knowing the God who reveals God. In the face of modernist revisions, and as a reform movement, the first-generation neo-Calvinist theologians (Kuyper and Bavinck) presented and defended theology as science concerning God for a generation. In doing so, Bavinck was self-consciously a catholic theologian, having learned and followed the theological methods and reasoning of Augustine, Bonaventura, John Calvin, and Franciscus Junius foremost.

The wedding of "public" to "theology" is of relatively recent origins, constituting a phrase that would make little sense in the premodern West. It appears rarely before the mid-twentieth century and was not a common referent in the discipline of theology until the 1980s. The development of public theology as a discipline was "fueled by a common desire to counteract the cultural marginalization of contemporary theology," as Linell Cady put it in 1987.[10] And if the primary underlying condition for public theology

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[6] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 1:47 (hereafter, *RD*).

[7] Ibid., 1:44.

[8] Ibid., 1:30.

[9] While Bavinck defines theology and the more specific task of dogmatic theology with the majority Christian tradition, he does so as a *sed contra* to Friedrich Schleiermacher and the mediation-theological movement's sharp separation between philosophy and theology. Bavinck understood the opposing trajectory *in toto* to argue that philosophy is the science that provides the *principia* of theological speech—a move dependent on Kant's separation of knowledge and faith.

[10] Linell E. Cady, "A Model for Public Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 80.2 (1987): 193.

was its reciprocal privatization, then the terminology was merely past due. Kuyper and Bavinck both addressed, for example, the sidelining of theology as a discipline within the university and theology as a force for good within the public square. Further, both the leaders of the neo-Calvinist movement repeatedly expressed the facts of theology for the practical sake of what is commonly called social teaching.

For Bavinck, Christian renewal does not cease as one exits the refuge of the church door. Rather, the Spirit's work of renewal and the Christian's path of witness extend to the totality of society, its institutions, public spaces, and cultural practices. The "mother-idea" underlying neo-Calvinist theology of this first generation, as Kuyper suggested, was the fact of creation *coram Deo*—that every human being lives life under the eye of the Creator of heaven and earth.[11] Everything, Kuyper argued, matters to God. For Bavinck, all theological reasoning, including attempts to know the objects of creation as created, "whether they concern the universe, humanity, Christ, and so forth—are but the explication of the one central dogma of the knowledge of God."[12] Brian Mattson comments on this particular sentence in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*: "Created things are not self-generating or self-sustaining. Everything is utterly dependent upon God for its existence. The implication of this, upon reflection, is staggering: not only is God relevant to everything, he is of *highest relevance* to everything."[13] If theology is the science concerning God, or that discipline that seeks to know God, then public-theological reasoning includes knowing all things in relation to God, in whom they all relate absolutely. Every creature, Bavinck repeatedly suggests (borrowing Friedrich Schleiermacher's famous dictum), is in a relationship of absolute dependence upon God. All things relate to and matter to God. The public-theological work of first-generation neo-Calvinism aided the various publics in knowing *how* all things relate to God.

Throughout his career, Bavinck's books and essays did indeed display this conviction. In 1891, and in the same year that Leo XIII and Kuyper addressed poverty and the "social question," Bavinck participated in the first social congress in Amsterdam, giving a paper illustriously titled "According to the Holy Scriptures, What General Principles Govern the Solution of the

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[11] Christianity "does not seek God in the creature, as paganism; it does not isolate God from the creature, as Islamism; it posits no mediate communication between God and the creatures, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters into immediate fellowship with the creature, as God the Holy Spirit." Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 12.

[12] *RD* 2:29.

[13] Brian Mattson, *What Is Public Theology?* (n.p.: Center for Cultural Leadership, 2011), 7.

Social Question, and What Pointers Are Provided for the Solution in the Concrete Application of These Principles that Is Given for the People of Israel in the Mosaic Law?"[14] Therein, he brought Scripture to bear upon the plight of the postindustrialized poor. One year later, in September of 1892, Bavinck gave the keynote address at the Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System titled "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on the Moral and Religious Conditions of Communities and Nations."[15] Bavinck's role in this tradition of social teaching is manifold. For example, at the end of his career, Bavinck, standing alongside his wife, was highly active in the fight for women's voting rights.[16]

Perhaps Bavinck's most famous theological treatment as public-theological reasoning is his work on the kingdom of God as "leaven." Kuyper elaborated his distinction between the church as institute and organism in 1870 in a sermon called "Rooted and Grounded," quoting Ephesians 3:17.[17] The people of God are both organized as an institution (contra pietist sects) and a living organism, a dispersed body (contra over-institutionalized Christendom). In the former, Kuyper imagines the marks of the church, and in the latter, the people of God branched out in the workplace. Kuyper built this distinction on the foundation of the Reformer's binary of a church that is both invisible and visible. Bavinck adds another binary: pearl and leaven. We ought to think of the church as invisible/visible, institution/organism, and also in possession of the gospel as the "pearl" of great price on the one hand and as a leavening agent on the other.[18] The people of God as an institution are called to proclaim the gospel as pearl, as the great treasure (Matt 13:45–46). The people of Christ, changed by the gospel from inside out, are to be "leavening" agents in temporal society—Bavinck's binary places Kuyper's binary within the bounds of biblical metaphor.

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[14] Herman Bavinck, "Welke algemeene beginselen beheerschen, volgens de H. Schrift, de oplossing der sociale quaestie, en welke vingerwijzing voor der oplossing ligt in de concrete toepassing, welke deze beginselen voor Israel in Mozaisch recht gevonden hebben?," in *Proces-verbaal van het Sociaal Congress, Amsterdam, November 9–12, 1891* (Amsterdam: Hoveker en Zoon, 1892), 149–57.

[15] See the *Proceedings of the Fifth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1892), 48–55.

[16] See James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 284, 286, 294.

[17] Abraham Kuyper, "Rooted and Grounded," in *On the Church*, ed. John Halsey Wood Jr. and Andrew M. McGinnis (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 46.

[18] Herman Bavinck, "Christian Principles and Social Relationships," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 141.

"The kingdom of heaven is not only a pearl; it is a leaven as well."[19] Herein, this neo-Calvinist public theology is a theology spoken for the people of God as the organism within public spheres. Bavinck's proclamation that the people of God as the visible kingdom go forth to be "leaven" is a specific type of public-theological reasoning.

One can then define Bavinck's work as public theologian in multiple ways. In this first level of public-theological discourse (his treatment of the pearl and leaven), Bavinck addresses the body of Christ, offering them a theology for going public. Herein, public theology is directed toward the church for the sake of the public and directs the organism of Christ's body in its calling and potential, helping Christians to understand how "the teaching of Scripture [addresses] societal relationships."[20] There is also a second aspect to Bavinck's public-theological discourse: on numerous occasions (as listed above) Bavinck takes the principles of Scripture and applies them to a particular issue as social teaching (like the Mosaic law and its implications for the social question). Yet there is also a third, and one that features prominently across his corpus: his philosophical work. Bavinck as philosopher is Bavinck as public apologist and prophet speaking to various publics all at once: the people of God, fellow academicians, and members of the society at large. Like his social teaching but without the direct method of applying the biblical text to the moment, his philosophical works stand as a polemic to the particular model of secularization that declares religion and consequently theology a private affair. The spirit of revolution attempted to banish theology from all public spheres, disallowing theology, or biblical reasoning, from informing the various domains of "public" life. For Bavinck, the majority of his works outside *Dogmatics* address general issues in contemporary society through the medium of philosophical reasoning, considering the moment in light of the timeless, which is for Bavinck always philosophical-theological. His two most significant works of philosophy are *Christian Worldview* and *Philosophy of Revelation*. The collected volume *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society* include several such as "Ethics and Politics."[21] As mentioned above, if theology is the science concerning God, or that discipline that seeks to know God, then public-theological reasoning includes knowing all things

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview,* trans. and ed. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); *Philosophy of Revelation*, trans. and ed. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Gray Sutanto (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018; hereafter, *PoR*).

in relation to God, in whom they all relate absolutely. The public-theological work of first-generation neo-Calvinist philosophy aided the various publics in knowing *how* all things relate to God.

II. *Bavinck's Philosophy as Public Theology*

Since, for Bavinck, theology is the science concerning God, it is a top-down exercise of receiving the speech of God in the work of revelation and systematizing its content as "faith seeking understanding." Consider the outline of his dogmatic reflection in volumes 2–4 of *Reformed Dogmatics*. He first considers God as he is in himself. Then, the meta-outline of his work follows the economy of God according to the processions: the Father (volume 2), the Son (volume 3), and the Spirit (volume 4). The study of the economy of God is founded upon *theologia*. Reciprocally, he understands philosophy to methodically proceed from the ground up. Philosophy considers an aspect of creaturely existence, particularly some aspect of nature, and moves upward toward the first principles of existence, unveiling the unity of reality. The philosophy of any given—"history, art, and the rest—must take its start from its object."[22] He commends idealism, at least, because "it takes its start from reality."[23]

While philosophy proceeds from the order of the empirical experience of knowing and moves to being in itself (its origin and foundation), Bavinck's philosophical work is an implication of his own description of the second task of dogmatics: tracing the unity of creaturehood in the light of God. While he famously suggests, after Junius, that theology is "thinking God's thoughts after Him," Bavinck adds that the task also includes a secondary move: "tracing their unity" or setting forth how all things relate to God and each other in light of God as Creator.[24] In his philosophical works, he carries forth the second aspect of dogmatics as an implication for how to consider an object: he traces the particular to the one, and the thing to its essence and foundation in Being itself. "When [theology] turns its attention to creatures, it views them only in relation to God as they exist from him and through him and for him [Rom. 11:36]."[25] He specifically declares his task in *Philosophy of Revelation*: to "trace the idea of revelation [a dogmatic idea]

[22] *PoR*, 23.
[23] Ibid., 47.
[24] *RD* 1:44.
[25] Ibid., 2:29.

… and correlate it with the rest of our knowledge and life."[26] For Bavinck, his constructive philosophy is *philosophia christiana*.

Specifically, in his philosophical works, Bavinck offers to the public a genealogy of the realities that the twentieth-century world prizes and locates those realities in God himself. He takes, for example, a philosophy of history to what he considers a necessary conclusion: the revelation of Christ, which "itself gives us history, the true content and kernel of all history. Christianity is itself history; it makes history."[27] He argues that apart from the revelation of Christ, history cannot exist. And of "nature and history" he argues, "The confession of the unity of God is the foundation of the true [philosophy] of nature and history."[28] Bavinck plays the role of public apologist and prophet, grounding the metaphysical in the being of the Triune God. Bavinck's philosophy therefore is public-theological reasoning, with the people of God, fellow academicians, and a wider public in his view. He reasons about topics that are of particular importance for these varying publics to show how they lead to, find their origin and principle in, and are unveiled by God and his act of revealing. His public theology remains unified to the basic task of theology: the knowledge of God.

Consider Bavinck's argument in *Christian Worldview* that Christianity is the end of philosophy. If philosophy suggests or desires to find a world grounded in wisdom, with wisdom pervading its parts, then it must be in search of the organism, or the source of the unity of being and its ground. He argues,

> It is the same divine wisdom [*Goddelijke wijsheid*] that created the world organically into a connected whole and planted in us the urge for a "unified" [*einheitliche*] worldview. If this is possible, it can be explained only on the basis of the claim that the world is an organism and has first been thought of as such. Only then do philosophy and worldview have a right and ground of existence, as it is also on this high point of knowledge that subject and object harmonize, as the reason within us corresponds with the principia of all being and knowing. And what philosophy has demanded according to its essence is then guaranteed and explained for us by the testimony of God in his word. It is the same divine wisdom that gives things existence and our thought objective validity, that bestows intelligibility to things and the power of thinking [*denkkracht*] to our mind, that makes the things real and our thoughts [*denkbeelden*] true.[29]

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[26] *PoR*, 25.
[27] Ibid., 115.
[28] Ibid., 111.
[29] Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 51.

Creation and revelation are the facts upon which philosophy "[has] a right and ground of existence." Further, in another essay he argues that the "Calvinistic principle is too universal and accordingly too rich and fruitful." It gives rise to not only a theology but also a "specific view of the world and life as a whole; so to speak, a philosophy all its own."[30] In other words, Reformed dogmatics begets *philosophia christiana*. For this reason, Bavinck's philosophy is presented *after* his dogmatic works. This is true both in principle and in chronology. The most significant philosophical texts of his career were written after his *Dogmatics*. He argues that the fact of God's revelation is the hope of philosophical satisfaction.

> The world itself rests on revelation; revelation is the presupposition, the foundation (*grondslag*), the secret (*geheim*) of all that exists in all its forms. The deeper science pushes its investigations, the more clearly will it discover that revelation underlies all created being. In every moment of time beats the pulse of eternity; every point in space is filled with the omnipresence of God; the finite is supported by the infinite, all becoming is rooted in being. Together with all created beings, that special revelation which comes to us in the Person of Christ is built on these presuppositions. The foundations of creation and redemption are the same.[31]

For Bavinck, the foundation of philosophy (that which gives it the right to exist) is the same as that for theology just as the foundation of creation and redemption are the same: the revelation of God. Theology and philosophy both consider God, humanity, and the world. These are the three totalizing terms Bavinck used to describe the subject matter of the human sciences. The basic distinction is that theology as a discipline methodologically begins from God, from God's speech; philosophy in practice begins from below, from humanity and the world to the foundation of creaturehood. The humanities, he argues in one essay, must consider their object from a Christian point of view.

> The fact that these disciplines actually belong to the literary department makes no difference. After all, the gospel of Christ is a joyous message not just for some people in certain circumstances, but for *every* person and for the *whole* person, for the learned as well as the simple, and no more for the theologian than for the literary scholar, the historian, the philosopher. I therefore fail to see why a Christian treatment of these disciplines is not permitted or not possible.[32]

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[30] Herman Bavinck, "The Future of Calvinism," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5 (1894): 5.
[31] *PoR*, 24.
[32] Herman Bavinck, "Theology and Religious Studies," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 59.

Bavinck's philosophical reasoning urges the public to consider then that God is the final cause of all creaturehood. In his work *God and Knowledge*, Nathaniel Sutanto concludes,

> To be clear, Bavinck here is not only claiming that Christian theism provides the answers to philosophy's questions, or that it is the product of a truly consistent philosophical undertaking. Rather, on the next page, he is clear that Christian theism is the grounds on which philosophy depends. The Christian religion, for Bavinck, "makes known to us through her revelation the same theism that upon unprejudiced investigation appears to be the foundation [*grondslag*] of all science and philosophy."[33]

Bavinck put it simply and succinctly early in his career: Christianity can "fashion for herself" a philosophy.[34]

In review, one can then describe Bavinck's public-theological reasoning in multiple ways, including his theology of the church as "leaven," as well as his direct social teaching. In addition, the term "public" in this third aspect serves the role of the objective genitive, where philosophical-theological reflection is an activity for the sake of the common good, directing the public's attention toward the metaphysical. Public theology in this vein is primarily speech from Christians to the world regarding how God matters to all the domains of life. In this method, public theology as a discipline maintains God as the ultimate object of its reflection even if at first indirectly, looking at creation and answering questions regarding how "all things" are ordered unto God. Therefore, the term public adds to theology the burden that theology must be shown to be relevant to all of life.[35]

III. *The Public Theology of "Ethics and Politics"*

Bavinck's 1916 article "Ethics and Politics" provides an illustration of his philosophical endeavors. First, to reflect more acutely on method, Bavinck routinely chose his subject matter based upon current events. Consider "Of Beauty and Aesthetics" in 1914, two years prior. He wrote that essay to

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[33] Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, *God and Knowledge* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2019), 53.

[34] Herman Bavinck "Theology of Albrecht Ritschl," trans. John Bolt, *The Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 123.

[35] Kevin Vanhoozer argues that ministers are the most common and important public theologians in that they, as he put it, "work for, with, and on people—the gathered assembly of the faithful—and lead them to live to God, bearing witness as a public spire in the public square." "Pastors, Theologians, and other Public Figures," in *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision,* ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 21.

address the rise of a "philosophy of beauty" in the academy of the moment. Regarding "Ethics and Politics," he was driven along by the events of the Great War to examine the relationship between the state and the fact of the moral. For Bavinck, the relation between the "good" and the organized community was the key idea that contemporary governments and political philosophers had failed to understand, leading to failures of international justice in the time of war, though unnamed in any detail in this essay.

The absence of contemporary particulars leads to the second point regarding his method. While Bavinck often responded to the now, he did so in a manner that brought his audience back to the timeless—to the metaphysical. While directed by the moment, he took up the subjects that have always "been and remain timely" and discussed them "objectively" for the sake of "insight," to place his reader under the wisdom of the ages.[36] Third, his works regularly return to a settled list of burdens imposed upon his audience in the climate of the modern: (i) the demise of religious foundations within European communities; (ii) the failure of materialism and the simultaneous multiplication of religious options—pluralism; (iii) the privatization of religion; (iv) the dismissal of sacred theology from the university; and (v) the confusion regarding and disagreements about the moral order, its constitution, its existence, and its commands.

In the today of 1916, as he writes, "there is no agreement" regarding the four primary philosophical concepts that govern the study of ethics: its origin, foundation, method, and criteria. Each is addressed in the following questions:[37] From where does the moral come? In what ground does its being subsist? How does one come to know the good? As an agent, how does one determine the moral fitness of any action? Bavinck typically works in reverse order, from the ground up. He brings theo-logic to bear upon the philosophical object, moving from creature to the necessity of God and moving back down again. To put it succinctly, the Great War petitioned Bavinck to assist his reader in awakening the basics of classical philosophical and religious reflection and then provokes an essay that spans the political and moral philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli and Hobbes, and of Hegel and the Hebrew Bible.

In addition to method, "Ethics and Politics" returns to several of Bavinck's quintessential public-theological determinations. These principles serve as public service announcements in a number of his works—truths that would aid the repair work needed in both academy and society following the

[36] Herman Bavinck, "Ethics and Politics," in *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, 261.
[37] Ibid.

mistakes of modern*ism*. The first is akin to an aspect of the method listed above: the failures of the present are the product of both the academy and various European publics being overly wed to current trends rather than steeped in the history of philosophy and religion. The second is perhaps the key determination of his famous work *Philosophy of Revelation* stated here in multiple forms: being precedes becoming; spirit precedes nature; the spiritual is logically prior to the material. He thus offers a metajustification of the universal phenomena that point toward a human "nature" including, here, the tendency toward the organization and governance of human society and well-being as politics. This point gives rise to the purpose of his philosophical work. Addressed to a number of publics including fellow academicians, churchmen, and any general reader who may open these pages, he largely writes for the purpose of justification: giving an ontological ground for the perpetual discoveries of nature. His metaphilosophical purpose here is to help the contemporary reader find agreement and satisfaction in the relationship between the intellectual and existential—between the "needs of the intellect" and the "needs of the heart."[38] Bavinck as public theologian offered a genealogy of the timeless. He taught the public the origin story of its institutions and desires.

The specific purpose of "Ethics and Politics" then is to establish that being precedes becoming and spirit precedes nature and that this metaphysical principle is apropos for discussing the relation between the ethical and political during the events of the Great War. Ultimately, Bavinck's essay surveys the concept of justice, and particularly the conditions of international justice. "The Christian principle," he concludes, "of the oneness of the human race in origin and essence, and the principle of the catholicity of God's Kingdom," are the two pillars of international justice and human rights. These realties are also desires rooted in natural law, with the natural law grounded in the eternal law. He argues then that international justice, especially in the time of war, will increase "to the degree that" its ethical basis "penetrates into the consciences of monarchs and nations." The biological and economic sciences offer no hope in finding the "kingdom of love and peace"; what remains is faith.

While this is the argument's conclusion, Bavinck takes three contemporary errors that have drifted from academia into the public square in varying degrees and turns these theses upside down to prophetically argue that the Christian God is the origin, foundation, and hope for the political. The first public error is the belief that the moral dimension of human experience is

[38] *PoR*, 69.

not an essential aspect of human nature but a movable construct. Bavinck chose to "proceed from the indisputable fact" that the moral is "an indestructible element of human nature," though he leaves open the question of its origin and foundation. As was common in his philosophical texts, he establishes his starting point on the basis of wider scholarship, citing Hugo de Vries among others to show that it is widely accepted that human nature includes a "moral element." Further, this moral element has specific, recognizable content. Gerhardus Heymans declares, "It is the same with ethics as with logic."[39] While the practitioners of the sciences often offer differing results about the moral as a construct of societies, Bavinck argues that they confess moral norms in their own practices, establishing themselves rigidly on the facts of truthhood and falsehood.

The second public error: "Nature has become the designation of the material world, with its material atoms and mechanical-chemical operations."[40] He was concerned that as far as some moral element is confessed to exist, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had overturned the priority of the spirit to the priority of nature. The work of Ludwig Feuerbach, historical materialism, and Darwinism produced an intellectual culture where "'nature' has become the designation of the material world" from which "people understand life, soul, and spirit. Thus the relationship was completely turned around: matter did not come from spirit, but the spirit from the material."[41] Now, brains precede thinking. The economic precedes the communal. The state is a product of natural economic forces and social contracts. "There is no need for the a priori or metaphysical," but only facts and the sciences. If this is true, then politics and ethics are opposites and the operation of the state is only ever *realpolitik*. Bavinck argues, however, that according to contemporary sociology, "as one moves backwards in time," there is no encounter with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's basically barbaric man, but with the most basically religious and judicial human. The "psychic, religious, ritualistic, ethical, and judicial" are hallmarks of the earliest peoples.[42] Reaching into the past, into the deep study of a particular, leads to the universal and the consistent: that the communal and moral do not emerge from "nature" but from spirit. The elements of love, sympathy, and character are the hallmarks of the earliest humanity. Society does not contain an economic foundation with a "judicial

[39] Bavinck, "Ethics and Politics," 262.
[40] Ibid., 265.
[41] Ibid., 265–66.
[42] Ibid., 268.

superstructure" but a "religious, ritualistic, and ethical character" all the way to the bottom.[43]

The third error is the idea that the fundamental truth of all politics and the key to all of history is the close connection between power and rule.[44] Bavinck pointed out the error that positivism had created by making a sharp distinction between the moral and political. He also unveiled how the current intellectual climate made the same mistake made by the sophists, among many others throughout history. Because politics is concerned with the conditions that generate the "well-being" of a community and nation, ethics or the moral is the ground of the political. Politics is "the application of ethics to the free citizen."[45] Contra the sophists, Niccolò Machiavelli, Hugo Grotius, and Thomas Hobbes, the origin of the political body and its ethic is not "might makes right" or the "strong rule the weak" or a contracted expediency (social contract); in these theories, justice is the creation of the state. Rather, politics as a science (*scientia*), art (*ars*), and practice (*praxis*) concerns the well-being of a community, "safeguarding its independence and freedom … for fulfilling its calling in the history of humanity."[46] Its origin and ground is the universality of a moral and communal anthropological nature. Because spirit precedes and establishes nature, nature establishes the community. The state as a product of nature does not refer to the political as a product of the biological or economic but of the moral and spiritual. It is desire and deed that make the realm of the political.

This fact is expressed as a universal and primordial human desire—the "Tao" (as it has been put), or "natural law"—for just order where righteousness is established apart from coercion. Such hope is unshakably grounded in the metaphysical reality of the moral. As Emil Lack said of the philosophy of law, "It is the search for a transcendental order … the question of a frame of being in a worldview."[47] Hoping in the possibility of righteousness apart from coercion is a product of the spirit that precedes nature—"one must obey God more than men."[48] In all this, he concludes that neither the state nor reason is the foundation of justice. The law is not justice. It varies and is liable to fault. The law "can never completely fill the demands of justice."[49] Rather, the *sein soll*, "what must be," is inherent in justice.[50] The moral and

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 267.
[45] Ibid., 269.
[46] Ibid., 264.
[47] Ibid., 272.
[48] Ibid., 274.
[49] Ibid., 271.
[50] Ibid.

the just are and have always been treated as two sides of the same coin, he argues. "Moral good is a just demand that the moral order of the world applies unconditionally in a categorical imperative to every person and the whole person; and justice (*jus*) is an application of the *justum* to certain forms of society." The close relationship "between morality" and seeking "justice," or "between ethics and politics" has its root in the "indivisible human nature" and "has been recognized at all times by all important people."[51] This "points out further that the idea of justice has a teleological character. … This urge is in man since birth, roots justice in morality, and creates an unbreakable bond between politics and ethics. Just order is grounded in moral order and possesses its strong, unshakeable permanence."[52]

To return to the conclusion, that spirit begets nature and the moral precedes the political, is necessary if there is to be anything called "international justice" and "human rights." If justice is merely a product of coercion, then the idea of international justice in the midst of a war is meaningless apart from an international army to internationally coerce. Further, without the justice of righteousness and the spiritual ground of the moral, then human rights are without reality and power apart from a temporal ruler. Bavinck pulls these reflections on moral and political philosophy into the domain of theo-logic. If any of these goods are the case, then the moral and just is an objective reality, founded in the eternal order, a creature of being itself. He suggests in the end that the primordial desire "from birth" for the kingdom of God and the fact of the unity of humanity as the image of God are the twin pillars of a "nature" that begets politics. There is hope for unity in diversity witnessed in the catholicity of the church, which bears testimony to both the unity of humanity and the eschatological kingdom. One can hear in these twin pillars the hope of a kingdom of righteousness without coercion and of true peace—the hope of the nations. For Bavinck, human nature includes the urge for justice, a product of the absolute dependence on God, a universal feeling, or simply put, religion. He writes elsewhere,

> Religion is more deeply rooted in the human heart than anything else. It is the immediate result of our being created in God's image and therefore radically integral to our nature. In religion, we regulate our relationship to God, the relationship that is central and foundational. Our relationship to our fellow humans and to all other creatures is the outflow of our relationship to God. Foundational to all issues is that of religion …. That which unites people in religion is stronger than material

[51] Ibid., 268.
[52] Ibid., 271.

> interests, natural love, or enthusiasm for science and art. People are prepared to sacrifice everything, even their own lives, for religion. For if they lose it, they lose their own selves, their own identities.[53]

Conclusion

Even in detailed considerations of moral and political philosophy, Bavinck reminds his readers that one's primordial desires, which reveal his human nature, are directed by the past and future facts of creation and re-creation. Therein, public theology includes the theologian speaking theologically for the good of the world. One of the crucial tasks of public theology, which Bavinck puts on display repeatedly, is that theology must tell the genealogy of the common institutions, values, and assumptions of the contemporary West. Bavinck aids his readers in understanding that a close look at the objects of existence, at the institutions that frame human life, will show that they are, as James Smith has put it, "awaiting the King."[54] To understand this truth is to help an agent act in accordance with the norms of flourishing even in the now.

[53] *RD* 4:276.

[54] James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

The Promises and Dangers of Public Theology[1]

SEUNG-GOO LEE

Abstract

In this article, I examine how public theology developed during the last several decades and point out several pitfalls in it. During this examination, I also draw out several ways in which Reformed public theology could be presented to avoid the dangers of public theology. That is, it must be based on Trinitarian theology and must be orthodox in the sense that it should not hold to a pluralistic view of salvation and not be panentheistic in its understanding of the relationship between God and the world.

Keywords:

Public theology, Reformed theology, religious pluralism, panentheism, Trinity, doing theology

Public theology in the broad sense of the word relates to discourse about the public arena of our lives. Theology in the past understood itself to have public relevance. In recent years, however, the term public theology refers to *a new way of doing theology* that seeks to reflect on problems of public significance with a

[1] This article was first delivered at the twelfth conference of the International Reformed Theological Institute hosted by the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, on June 15–18, 2017. The conference was on "Public Theology in Plural Contexts." It has been published in Korean in Seung-Goo Lee, *Reformed Theology in the Naked Public Arena* (Suwon: Hapshin Theological Press, 2010), 22–53 (in this article, italics in quotations are the author's).

view to impacting society as a whole. This new way of doing theology I call *public theology proper*: "a growing perception of *the need for theology to interact with public issues of contemporary society*,"[2] a "systematic reflection on issues relating to public life, carried out in the light of theological conviction and with the aid of the theological disciplines."[3] Such theology is "a mode of doing theology that is intended to address matters of public importance."[4] Kevin Vanhoozer states that public theology in this form is "first and foremost *a reaction against* the tendency to privatize the faith, restricting it to the question of an individual's salvation."[5] As such it "is an engagement of living religious traditions with their public environment—the economic, political, and cultural spheres of common life."[6] Victor Anderson affirms that public theology is "the deliberate use of religious language and commitments to *influence substantive public discourse*, including public debates on moral."[7] A problem lies in the fact that even though we use "public theology" *in sensu stricto*, the meanings that people give to it vary. Everybody uses the term in his or her own way: "When one starts to read on the topic of public theology a wide range of overlapping opinions and contrasting viewpoints are found."[8]

In this article, I will first examine various public theologies, from the classic model to some recent attempts. Then I will discuss the elements or factors of public theology that make theological discussion truly *public*. Subsequently, I will reflect on the dangers of public theology and present some pitfalls that make theological discussion about the public arena less than Christian theology. Ultimately, we aim for a public theology to be *truly Christian* theology.

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[2] Sebastian Kim, "Editorial," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1.1 (2007): 1.

[3] "Public Theology in the Canadian Context," http://publictheology.org/, Centre for Public Theology at Huron University College, at the University of Western Ontario.

[4] John W. de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1.1 (2007): 40.

[5] Kevin J. Vanhoozer with Owen Strahan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 17.

[6] Kim, "Editorial," 2.

[7] Victor Anderson, "Contour of an African American Public Theology," *Journal of Theology* 104 (Summer 2000): 50.

[8] Cf. Ronell M. Bezuidenhout, "Re-imaging Life: A Reflection on 'Public Theology' in the Work of Linell Cady, Dense Ackermann and Ethinne de Villers" (PhD diss., Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 2007), 5, cited in Cobus van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," 10, SCRIBD, https://www.scribd.com/document/19661433/David-Bosch-as-Public-Theologian.

I. *Various Past Public Theologies*

It is a common opinion that there are various public theologies. For example, in a conference at Edinburgh in 2001, John de Gruchy began his discussion of public theology with the observation that there is no "universal public theology" but only various public theologies concerned with political problems in various areas.[9]

1. *Traditional Theologies with Public Orientation*

First of all, we may think of several traditional theologies that had a strong sense of the public nature of theology. Even those who want to develop a *new* public theology admit that public theology is *in facto* not a totally new concept, since theology has always sought to have a contextual or social relevance. John Calvin's and Abraham Kuyper's theologies reflect public concern.[10] Martin Luther also recognized ordinary people's work as *vocatio* (*Beruf*), and Lutheran theologies related to the creation order can also be mentioned as forerunners of public theology. The two-kingdom theology developed by Lutherans may be presented as a true vision of public theology in contrast with Calvinism, which tries to build the kingdom of God on earth.[11] On the other hand, others consider the Calvinistic vision as a better approximation of public theology than the Lutheran. Calvin was actively involved in public life in Geneva, and John Knox applied what he had learned from Calvin in a "national reformation" in Scotland. Jonathan Edwards is a case in point in the eighteenth century.[12] Kuyper, who promoted a renaissance of Calvinism in the Netherlands, renewed discussion of public theology.[13] It is natural that the center for public theology founded in

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[9] John W. de Gruchy, "From Political to Public Theologies: The Role of Theology in Public Life in South Africa," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 45.

[10] David W. Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, and Civil Liberties* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009); Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

[11] See, e.g., Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 26–52.

[12] Cf. Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

[13] Cf. Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*; Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*; Vincent E. Becote, "Abraham Kuyper's Rhetorical Public Theology with Implication for Faith and Learning," *Christian Scholar's Review* 37.4 (Summer 2008): 407–25.

2002 at Princeton Theological Seminary be named The Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology.[14]

2. *Neo-Orthodox Theologies as Forerunners of Public Theology*

The opinion that Karl Barth's theology had the features of public theology is quite current.[15] Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans Frei, under the influence of Barth, also have characteristics of public theology.[16] It is generally thought that Martin Marty of Chicago University coined the term public theology in the line of Barth. Duncan Forrester, a recognized Scottish public theologian, judges the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr important for the formation of public theology.[17]

3. *The Irony of Anabaptist Theology*

It is ironic that Anabaptist theology, which tended to avoid the public area in the past, is now regarded as one of the important influences on public theology. This is partly due to the efforts of some Anabaptist theologians who tried to present their case to the wider world and partly due to its reception in the theological world. For example, John Howard Yoder (1929–1997) made a great contribution in making the Anabaptist voice heard with his major works.[18] Equally important was the contribution of Stanley Hauerwas and

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[14] Cf. http://kcpt.ptsem.edu/. The Kuyper conference, which started in 1998 at Princeton Theological Seminary, has been hosted at the Prince Conference Center on the Calvin University campus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, since 2018. Cf. https://calvin.edu/events/kuyper-conference/.

[15] Cf. Martin Laubscher, "A Search for Karl Barth's Public Theology: Looking into Some Defining Areas of His Work in the post-World War II Years," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1.3 (2007): 231–46.

[16] Frits de Labge, "Against Escapism: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Contribution to Public Theology," in *Christian in Public Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology*, ed. Len Handsen (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2007), 141–52; Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans Frei's Public Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

[17] Duncan B. Forrester, "The Scope of Public Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17.2 (August 2004): 9–10. See also Victor Anderson, "The Wrestle of Christ and Culture in Pragmatic Public Theology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 19.2 (May 1998): 135, 138–39; Raimundo Barreto Jr., "Christian Realism and Latin American Liberation Theology: Expanding the Dialogue," *Koinonia* 15.1 (2003): 95–122.

[18] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992); Yoder with M. Cartwright, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998); *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001); *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. T. Geddert (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003); *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Harold Stassen and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution,* ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

W. H. Willimon, who embraced this perspective and presented its insights, even though they are not themselves Anabaptists.[19] They sought to show an alternative social perspective.[20] William Storrar described their approach as *ecclesial*, offering "an alternative model of human society rather than seeking to manage its problems."[21] In his view, this vision of an alternative community does not itself make for "public" theology.

4. *Liberation Theologies as Forerunners of Public Theology*

Jürgen Moltmann once used the term public theology to depict the direction of the way in which all his theological concerns can be expressed.[22] His political theology, eco-theology, and theology of nature—all have an orientation toward public theology. Moreover, he says that Christian theology is public theology because it is the theology of the kingdom of God.[23] As Professor Hyung-Gi Lee has well pointed out, "Moltmann regards that not only his own theology, but also the liberation theology of the Latin America, Feminist theology and Black theology belong to public theology."[24] It cannot be denied that every theology that seeks to liberate people from either political and economic oppression, sexism, or racism is a kind of public theology. Forrester believes that public theology today

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[19] See Stanley Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), esp. 44–46; Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1992); Stanley Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

[20] William F. Storrar criticizes Stanley Hauerwas for wanting to make the church an alternative community, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1.1 (2007): 11.

[21] Ibid., 8–9.

[22] Jürgen Moltmann, "Theology for Christ's Church and the Kingdom of God in Modern Society," in *A Passion for God's Reign: Theology, Christian Learning, and the Christian Self*, ed. Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 51–52.

[23] Jürgen Moltmann, cited in Christopher D. Marshall, "What Language Shall I Borrow? The Bilingual Dilemma of Public Theology," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 13.3 (2005): 11.

[24] Hyung-Gi Lee, "The Horizon of Public Theology: The Kingdom of God," unpublished paper, 1. Lee is thinking especially of Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); see also, Scott R. Paeth, "Jürgen Moltmann's Public Theology," *Political Theology* 6.2 (2005): 215–34, which is adapted from his dissertation "From the Church to the World: Public Theology and Civil Society in Dialogue with the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004).

comes from the political theologies of the sixties and Latin American liberation theology.[25]

5. *Roman Catholic Public Theology*

John Courtney Murray, S.J. (1904–67) is the most significant figure to bring together Roman Catholic theology and the American tradition from the 1940s to the 1960s. After studying classics and philosophy at Boston College and at Woodstock Theological Center, Maryland, he completed his PhD on the Trinity and grace at the Gregorian University in Rome in 1937. He taught at his *alma mater*, Woodstock Theological Center, until his death. He presented his public theology by asserting the compatibility of American constitutionalism and Roman Catholicism.[26] In his words, "The American thesis is that government is not juridically omnicompetent. Its powers are limited, and one of the principles of limitation is the distinction between state and church, in their purposes, methods, and manner of organization." Further, he "asserts the theory of a free people under limited government, a theory that is recognizably part of the Christian political tradition, and altogether defensible in the manner of its realization under American circumstances."[27]

David Tracy, another Roman Catholic theologian, states that since "all theology is public discourse,"[28] theologians should be aware of their audience, the theologians' "public." He continues that nowadays there are "three publics of theology: Society, academy, and the Church."[29] In a pluralistic world the theologian does not speak merely to the church, that is, the congregation, but also to the academy and to society as a whole. Hence, according to Tracy, we have to develop language to speak to society as a whole.

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[25] Forrester, "The Scope of Public Theology," 14. For a discussion of the public theological characteristics of liberation theology, see Raimundo C. Barreto, "Christian Realism and Latin American Liberation Theology," *Koinonia* 15.1 (2003): 95–122.

[26] "John Courtney Murray," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Courtney_Murray.

[27] As cited in "John Courtney Murray," http://johncourtneymurray.blogspot.kr/. For good discussions of his public theology, see Robert W. McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray* (New York: Paulist, 1989); Robert P. Hunt and Kenneth L. Grasso, eds., *John Courtney Murray and the American Civil Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Thomas P. Ferguson, *Catholic and American: The Political Theology of John Courtney Murray* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1993).

[28] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3.

[29] Ibid.

II. *The Rise of Public Theology Proper*

Recent attempts to do public theology proper come from an awareness of the fact that society is a major audience of theology, even though it might not be attentive to what theologians are saying. It looks like a one-sided love situation. Since the secular world does not listen to discourse that does not meet its own criteria, something based on reason and with a pattern that is accessible to the public must be offered. This is the justification offered by Tracy and others for a new style of public theology that is different from traditional theology and entails a public orientation. As George van Wyngaard states, "if Christian theology, after the demise of Christendom and the shift in consensus still claims to have public relevance, a new approach towards the public conversation needed to be found."[30]

Those who seek to develop public theology in this sense understand "public" in Tracy's third sense, as society, public life, in the world.[31] What is important is how to influence public opinion. Those who are influential in forming public opinion are the main audience of the new public theology. According to this restricted sense, theologies that take the church and the academy as their audience are not regarded as doing public theology. They are not public enough. So public theology proper considers that a new way that engages with public discourse is needed in the public domain and that we have to go beyond doing theology merely for church or academy while accepting them as co-workers in public theology.[32] It is an act of engaging in public discourse "to help in the building of a decent society by offering distinctive and constructive insights from its treasury of faith"[33] by developing a "theology which seeks the welfare of the city before protecting the interests of the Church."[34]

Several representative centers of public theology in Scotland, England, and the United States were founded in recent years to develop public theology.[35] The late professor Max Stackhouse (1935–2016) made an

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[30] George J. van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," *Missionalia* 39.1/2 (2011): 13.

[31] According to van Wyngaard, Dirkie Smit made exactly this point in his lecture at the Center for Public Theology of Pretoria University. Cf. Diekie Smit, "Wat beteken publiek?," Unpublished lecture at the Center for Public Theology, University of Pretoria, August 2008, cited in van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," 15.

[32] Cf. Storrar, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," 12.

[33] Van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," 21.

[34] Forrester, "The Scope of Public Theology," 6.

[35] Cf. John Atherton, *Public Theology for Changing Times* (London: SPCK, 2000).

important contribution, developing a Kuyperian perspective.[36] He was concerned with globalization and identified it as a major theological concern in 1988.[37] While taking a positive approach, he pointed out several misunderstandings, including that of reducing it to merely an economic problem: "The inquiry into why globalization is taking its present shape, and organizing the economic forces the way it does convinces me that an economistic view is too limited—so limited, in fact, that to treat it as such is to obscure the scope, structure, force and meaning of the phenomenon."[38] Globalization is

> *a worldwide set of social, political, cultural, technological and ethical dynamics, influenced and legitimated by certain theological, ethical and ideological motifs, that are creating a worldwide civil society that stands beyond the capacity of any nation-state to control.* It is influencing every local context, all peoples, all social institutions and the ecology of the earth itself. It is forming an alternative postmodernism, one that has elements of the fragmentation and the relativization of all previous securities, but that also is demanding the rediscovery of universalistic principles of anthropology, spirituality, morality and law, refining distinctive purposes and forming new institutions that require common recognition.[39]

Stackhouse sought to engage with the new world situation and thought theology could "play a critical role in reforming the 'powers' that are becoming more diverse and autonomous."[40] His concern was "how God wants us to live in the global civilization, to respond to it, and to shape it."[41]

Another attempt to do public theology from a somewhat different perspective is that of Ronald Thiemann, who envisages a cosmic Christology and the shape of the church in a pluralistic culture.[42] Christian public

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[36] Cf. Max L. Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); *Creeds, Society, and Human Rights* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

[37] Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); *Christian Social Ethics and the Globalization of Economic Life* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996); Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, eds., *God and Globalization 1: Religion and the Powers of the Common Life* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, eds., *God and Globalization 2: The Spirit and Modern Authorities* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001); Max L. Stackhouse and Peter J. Paris, eds., *God and Globalization 3: Christ and the Dominions of Civilization* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002); Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization 4: Globalization and Grace* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2007). See also Scott R. Paeth, E. Harold Breitenberg Jr., and Hank Joon Lee, eds., *Shaping Public Theology: Selections from the Writings of Max L. Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

[38] Stackhouse, *God and Globalization 4*, 1–2.

[39] Ibid., 8.

[40] "Max Lynn Stackhouse," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Lynn_Stackhouse.

[41] Stackhouse, "General Introduction," in *God and Globalization 1*, 7.

[42] Ronald F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

theology has two purposes: "to understand the relation between Christian convictions and the broad social and cultural context within which the Christian community lives" and "to identify the particular places where Christian convictions intersect with the practices that characterize contemporary public life."[43]

A further representative of American public theology is Victor Anderson at the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. From an "African American" perspective,[44] he develops "an American public theology capable of criticizing our public culture driven by economic growth, multinational expansion, a burgeoning American middle class, and moral decay, violence, prison over population and privatization, and the like."[45]

There exists a global network for public theology founded in Princeton in 2007 and an *International Journal for Public Theology* published by Brill.[46]

III. *The Promise of Public Theology Proper*

Unlike traditional theology with public orientation, public theology proper has several distinguishing features.

First of all, theologians "engage the secular world in terms of its issues while at the same time digging deeply into the Christian tradition for the resources necessary for doing so."[47] Doing public theology requires not losing sight of Christian insights and uniqueness, and also learning the secular language to communicate with the world. Public theology implies "a deliberate use of common language in a commitment to influence public decision-making." A "substantive public discourse" appreciates the insights of scholarship other than theology *in sensu stricto*.[48] It tries to dialogue with other disciplines, like politics, economics, cultural studies, and social

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[43] Ibid., 21–22.

[44] Cf. Victor Anderson, *Pragmatic Theology: Negotiating the Intersections of an American Philosophy of Religion and Public Theology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); "The Search for Public Theology in the United States," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: Festschrift for David Buttrick*, ed. Thomas Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 19–31; "The Wrestle of Christ and Culture in Pragmatic Public Theology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 19.2 (May 1998): 135–50; and "An American Public Theology in the Absence of Giants: Creative Conflict and Democratic Longings," in *Ethics that Matters: African, Caribbean, and African American Sources*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs and James Samuel Logan (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 195–214.

[45] Anderson, "Contour of an African American Public Theology," 50.

[46] Cf. http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/15316.

[47] Duncan B. Forrester, "Working in the Quarry: A Response to the Colloquium," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. Storrar and Morton, 431.

[48] Kim, "Editorial," 1.

studies. To be accepted by other disciplines, public theology develops "a methodology which is acceptable to, and understandable by, both the general public and special academic disciplines."[49]

Secondly, theology done in this way is "a modest but truthful, constructive and challenging contribution to public debate [and] human flourishing."[50] That is, public theology has the potential and power to change the world in which we live and to have change as one of its purposes. Academic theologians should be "developing categories that are capable of affecting the ethical conscience of the political community."[51] Therefore, public theology must be "healing, reconciling, helping and challenging."[52]

Thirdly, public theology hopes for a better world and seeks solutions for real problems. It is "utopian" theology in the sense in which Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) used the term.[53] The task of public theology, therefore, cannot be maintaining or confirming the *status quo*, but always "[seeking] its ongoing transformation."[54] Public theology tries to make this world a better place to live in.

IV. *How to Avoid Pitfalls in Doing Public Theology Proper*

Almost all those engaged in the task of public theology affirm that it must be Christian witness. De Gruchy says that public theology is Christian witness that includes social action and social debates.[55] Van Wyngaard also says that "public theology moves away from an approach that limits the language of theology only to the private sphere, and argues that the language of faith does have public truth."[56] But how can it be Christian witness? To answer this question, I will point out several elements without which our theology is not Christian anymore and argue that a public theology that misses these elements is not *Christian* public theology and no longer Christian witness.

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[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] Forrester, "Working in the Quarry," 432.
[51] Kim, "Editorial," 2.
[52] Forrester, "Working in the Quarry," 436.
[53] Ibid., 433–38; Forrester, "Scope of Public Theology," 14; cf. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1936).
[54] De Gruchy, "From Political to Public Theology," 59.
[55] De Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," 40.
[56] Van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," 18.

Fundamentally, public theology must be *Christian* witness in the secular world. Sometimes we may lose our peculiar Christian voice in the process of reflecting upon and doing social activity relating to specific problems of our society. One of the most important criteria for judging public theology, therefore, is how much power it has for being Christian witness in our society. Just adding to the world another voice that echoes many voices out there is not a reason for Christian theologians to speak out. What is needed is a Christian voice about specific problems. If we tell the same story the world can hear from others, why should it listen? The task of public theology is to find specific Christian insights about a particular problem and present them in an understandable way to the secular world.

There are five pits into which public theology can fall.

Firstly, we should not abandon Christian theism in the process of doing public theology. Just as in the nineteenth century people abandoned the Trinity in their thinking about God, if we are not careful, we can give the impression that Trinitarian thinking can be placed on the back burner or even forgotten. It is easy to use the term *God* in a way that Jews or Muslims can accept in public theology dialogues. In this context Stackhouse's attempt to see the civilizations of the world attaining "a diversity that can be mutually elated" based on the doctrine of the Trinity is interesting and meaningful.[57] According to Storrar, David Bosch provided a "paradigm of mission that seeks to hold together all aspects of the triune God's mission to the world in creative tension."[58] Just mentioning the Trinity in a formal way is also problematic.

Secondly, public theology should not imply universal salvation in the discussion of public matters. It is easy to focus only on social concerns, since we are not discussing soteriological issues, particularly when "the welfare of the city" is the agenda rather than "the welfare of the church."

Thirdly, a kind of panentheistic thinking may be implied in the discussion of public matters. Like many theologies which imply that God is influenced by the processes of the world, public theology with a keen concern for social process should avoid panentheistic presuppositions.

Fourthly, discussions about the transformation of society and culture may imply that the world can be changed by the united efforts of human beings. So it is necessary to be careful not to adopt an anthropocentric or synergistic view in public theology.

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[57] Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Political Economy in a Global Era," in *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, ed. Storrar and Morton, 190–91.

[58] Storrar, "A Kairos Moment for Public Theology," 11.

Fifthly, public theology should be a theology that bears witness to the kingdom of God not yet consummated, but inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So public theology should be a part of kingdom theology.[59] The philosophy of Jürgen Habermas illustrates the difference between Christian kingdom theology and humanistic ideas about the human future.[60]

Conclusion

While the problem of being "public" in public theology is related to being accessible and heard in the world, it is crucial to have specifically Christian content to communicate. So, we have to make the content clear in the church. Otherwise, we might err in discussing public problems on the basis of natural law (the classic Roman Catholic approach as well as that of some Protestants), common reason (Habermas and his followers), or sentiment or morality (the approach of the cultural Protestantism in the nineteenth century). The inner church language of public theology should have the characteristics of biblical, theological, and church historical reflections that contribute to making the message clear. Thus, its message must be decisively Christian, biblical, and theological, refined through the lens of unfolding church history.

Then the same contents that we have shared with the church can be translated into the language of secular society, the second-order language of public theology. So there must be a sameness of contents and an otherness of language. This is one of the main problems in public theology: How can we translate Christian contents into "publicly accessible language"?[61] How can we not lose the Christian contents and uniqueness in the process of translation into secular language? At the same time, we have to know when to use "the language of faith in the public square" and to attempt "to speak of God in the public square neither too early nor too late."[62]

After hearing what we are saying, then, the public (people outside the church) should recognize what they are hearing, so they may compare and distinguish what they are saying on this specific problem and what we are

[59] Cf. Seung-Goo Lee, "Towards a Kingdom Theology," *Studies in Reformed Theology*, Korean Edition (Seoul: Hana Publishing Company, 1999), chapter 1.

[60] For Habermas's understanding of the public square, see Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere (1964)," in *The Idea of the Public Sphere: A Reader*, ed. Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander, and Graham Murdock (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2010), 114ff.; Craig J. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and Public Square* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[61] Cf. van Wyngaard, "David Bosch as Public Theologian," 18.

[62] Marshall, "What Language Shall I Borrow?," 16–17.

saying. This is why our message must be both accessible to the public and unique. If they cannot understand the language because it is communicated in an obscure way, then doing public theology is meaningless. At the same time, if they hear from us what they are already saying and hearing in perhaps a better way, then public theology is void. The public must understand what we are saying to them at the very least. Moreover, it ought to be more persuasive to them than other options.

To have persuasive power we must use insights from other disciplines as well. In this sense, public theology is an interdisciplinary enterprise. There are, however, limits to using insights from other disciplines, set by the goal of not losing the specific Christian perspective in the discussion of public problems. If we are open minded, everything that can explain and transform the world can contribute to our message on specific social problems.

Christian Formation in Practical Public Theology

JENNIFER PATTERSON

Abstract

Practical public theology engages questions concerning life together in a political community. Forming Christians in practical public theology draws on biblically informed principles and the experience of community in the church. It fosters a conception of public life that is wider than the strictly political, enabling responses with the resources and capacities of spheres beyond government alone. It cultivates a disposition to discern the multiple theological principles in many concerns of our common life and attention to multiple factors from the perspectives of practitioners in other spheres. Finally, practical public theology equips Christians to recognize more than material dimensions in challenges facing individuals and communities and to respond relationally, through loving service to all neighbors.

Keywords

Practical public theology, formation, creation, cultural mandate, common grace, image of God, stewardship, poverty, conscience, gender identity

Introduction

Hannah More was a successful poet and playwright among the literary elite of London when she read John Newton's *Cardiphonia* in 1780. The evangelical book occasioned a spiritual renewal in the lifelong Anglican. When her mother died several years later, she found a maternal figure in

Margaret Middleton, whose dining room was the center of much abolitionist activity. There More grew convicted to join the public cause. In 1787, she met William Wilberforce, and with others they organized a campaign against slavery made up of politicians, religious leaders, and artists. She used her skill as a writer to stir the British conscience against the horror of slavery. It would take twenty years to bring down the slave trade and almost half a century to enact legislation abolishing slavery, in 1833, the year that both Wilberforce and More died. They "were sustained in their long efforts not only by religious faith but also by the vitality of a moral imagination," writes Karen Swallow Prior in her biography of More.[1]

A biblically formed capacity to imagine social change was also a preeminent quality of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he confronted racial bigotry a century later. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24), he wrote from Birmingham Jail in 1963, in a letter articulating his carefully reasoned protest of unjust laws.[2] Anthony Bradley attributes that moral imagination to the scriptural convictions of the black church in which King and others of his generation were raised, particularly its conviction about human dignity. He observes, "The liberation narrative of Exodus carried special meaning for a people whose experience of the New World began in slavery."[3]

Shaped by Scripture and formed by Christian community, More and King exemplified a practical public theology: their practice of faith engaged public life. These luminaries dealt with great moral crises in their day, but the point is relevant with respect to all Christians engaging the full range of matters relating to public life, from the mundane to the monumental. The practice of public theology brings biblically informed principles and insights from the experience of covenant community in the church to bear on questions about how to order our lives together in political society, as fallen human beings with transcendent longings and material needs.

The idea of public theology considered here is *public* in a number of ways. It concerns the faith that the church is called to publicly proclaim, rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—events that are part of public

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[1] Karen Swallow Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More—Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist* (Nashville: Nelson, 2014) 105, 115–21, 136. More also started Sunday schools to promote literacy and scriptural knowledge among children in poverty, ibid., 139–62.

[2] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963. The Martin Luther King Jr., Research and Education Institute, Stanford University. Available at https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail.

[3] Anthony Bradley, *Black and Tired: Essays on Race, Politics, Culture, and International Development* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 86–87.

history, of which it confesses Jesus to be Lord, with effects that ultimately extend to restoring all creation. Public theology concerns questions of how to organize public (i.e., common) life together in a political community as citizens determine what is worth pursuing as a society, what to avoid or prohibit, what to accomplish together, and what problems we need to solve. It assumes the relevance of Christian faith to such questions, and it continually seeks discernment about the complex pathways of that application. It testifies to a created reality known to all. It concerns the public, as a body politic; it seeks the welfare of all human beings and the good of all creation. It is concerned with Christians' duties as members of the public—including as citizens under political authority responsible for stewarding the calling of citizenship wisely and well. Finally, it concerns the public as understood to be wider than the strictly political, enabling responses to the challenges of our common life with the resources and capacities of spheres beyond government alone.[4]

Oliver O'Donovan observes that theology, "simply by responding to the dynamics of its own proper themes,"[5] makes important aspects of public life more intelligible in a way that prevalent cultural accounts cannot.[6] Theology can therefore serve by "educating a people in the practical reasonableness required for their political tasks."[7] Relatedly, James Smith has highlighted how liturgical formation in the church[8] contributes as well to a "social imaginary by which we 'read' the political."[9]

Forming believers in practical public theology fosters a vision of life together in political community. Such formation draws on theological principles and the experience of gathering as God's people in the church, including the shaping that comes through its teaching, ministry life, habits of prayer, and anticipation of the Spirit's work in common grace. What characterizes such a vision?

First, where general public discourse tends to focus one-dimensionally on the political sphere, practical public theology brings depth perception: it

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[4] This piece examines the question of practical public theology in the context of representative government in advanced modernity, specifically with a view to the United States.

[5] Oliver O'Donovan, *Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

[6] Oliver O'Donovan, *Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), xiii, xv.

[7] Ibid., xv.

[8] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 133–54.

[9] James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 64; see also Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 146. Taylor defines *social imaginary* as "the way that we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life."

sees a multiplicity of created dimensions in social life, a layered landscape of institutions at work in our common life. This also generates respect for particular callings in public life and their specialized knowledge and practical reason.

Second, where typical public discourse can often simplistically represent issues, practical public theology brings a more fine-tuned situational awareness: it recognizes multiple theological principles in many concerns of our common life. This approach also develops awareness that multiple factors are involved from the perspectives of other institutional practitioners as well (educators have particular knowledge of the multi-dimensional challenges facing schools, medical professionals of the health care system, etc.).

Third, where political discourse frequently focuses on the merely material, practical public theology discerns both spiritual and material dimensions of human life and their complex interaction in many problems facing individuals and communities, and it instinctively leans toward relational responses. This also entails a sober assessment of the limits of government and political measures for satisfying the range of human needs and the desire for meaning, purpose, and fullness in life.

Shaped by such ways of seeing public life, Christians have the opportunity to engage more deeply the longing of every person for wholeness and peace, individually and in relationships, a longing at the root of many challenges. To know the Creator and his Word is to have insight about how God has designed the world for human flourishing and to desire our neighbors' good in light of it. To partake in the covenant community of the church is to have our longings shaped by the Spirit, our imaginations stretched by life in the Spirit, and our hopes for the world attuned to the Spirit's work in common grace. A practical public theology commends these excellencies (1 Pet 2:9) through loving service to all our neighbors.

I. *Knowledge of the Creator and His Word*

1. *Depth Perception: Seeing the Created Dimensions of Our Common Life*

The tasks God gives humanity in Genesis 1:28—to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion—imply a cascade of further imperatives for their fulfillment.[10] This is the charge to form culture, "the

[10] David VanDrunen makes similar points about the extent of the implied cultural activities and associational life in his treatment of both Genesis 1:28 and 9:1–7. See David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 80–86, 215–17. William Edgar highlights the range of human activity in response to

communal calling of the human race to make the world its own," writes Herman Bavinck.[11] These human endeavors require particular mastery of the various aspects of created reality.[12] As Bavinck describes it, "In order to rule over nature in the broadest sense, its essence, operation, pathways, and laws must be known."[13] God's design yielded a cosmos with structure and stability, as the very arrangement of the account in Genesis 1 conveys,[14] making it knowable and full of latent possibility.

Every field of cultural activity therefore reflects the structures and order of the creation it strives to know and develop.[15] Such specialization in response to God's ordered creation establishes for these cultural domains a scope of delegated authority within their respective spheres, as Abraham Kuyper emphasized.[16] Similarly, the God-ordained institutions of family, government, and church have their respective jurisdictions.[17] Together they are all subject to God's ultimate sovereignty. The profundity of creation and the consequent magnitude of the Genesis 1:28 mandate entail a division of labor[18] from which cultural spheres emerge with a legitimacy that warrants reciprocal acknowledgment among them.[19]

God's blessing and command in Genesis 1:27–30 as imaging God's governance of creation. William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 166–68.

[11] Herman Bavinck, "The Kingdom of God, The Highest Good," trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 161.

[12] *Mastery* is used here in the sense of study shaped by the coherence of qualities in the object or field of inquiry.

[13] Ibid.

[14] James W. Skillen notes Old Testament scholarship comparing the Genesis creation account, with its rhythm of forming and filling, to the construction of a royal dwelling, in which the divine sovereign installs humanity, his image, to represent him. See James W. Skillen, *The Good of Politics: A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 22–23.

[15] Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 25.

[16] Ibid., 99. What Kuyper called "sphere sovereignty," others have described as "differentiated responsibility" (ibid.) or "structural pluralism" (Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 124–25).

[17] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 99.

[18] On division of labor, see Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, *God and Knowledge: Herman Bavinck's Theological Epistemology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 61 (in the context of Bavinck's analogous description of the diversity of the sciences, reflective of creation).

[19] This is not to say that all development of cultural activities in a fallen world is a legitimate expression of the cultural mandate in a moral sense; see Wolters's distinction between the structure and direction in cultural activity, Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 59. On the idea of reciprocal acknowledgment, see James K. A. Smith's essay in *Five Views on the Church and Politics*, ed. Amy E. Black (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 148–55; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 157–71.

Bavinck amplifies these ideas with observations about the unity and diversity found throughout creation, a reflection of the paradigmatic unity-in-diversity of the Trinity.[20] Even as cultural activities diversify and proliferate, they share a unity of principle and *telos* (goal).[21] According to Bavinck's account, the totality of knowledge and reality forms an organic whole, as all truth is grounded in divine wisdom.[22] This application of Bavinck's organic motif, emphasizing unity in diversity,[23] explains why he can insist that each human institution and cultural sphere has an independence and integrity in itself while also cohering in a unity that can only be illuminated fully by special revelation. Thus he writes both that "theology accords to the other sciences their full due"[24] and that Scripture "is a light on our path and a lamp for our feet, also with respect to science and art. It claims authority in all areas of life."[25]

Sin, however, denies that ultimate authority, claims autonomy, and yields fragmentation and incoherence. How shall theology respond? The "queen of the sciences"[26] takes the posture of her Lord in his earthly ministry as she awaits his return as victorious King. "Theology also can rule only by serving," writes Bavinck in his treatise on common grace.[27] Nathaniel Gray Sutanto describes the relationship Bavinck envisions between theology and other fields of knowledge as one of reciprocity: "She serves them with her gifts—she can unify them and give them their proper context, and she can show how they are closely interconnected."[28] In so doing, theology testifies to the reconciliation of all things in Christ.[29]

In the meantime, thanks to God's common grace, the development of creation continues beyond the fall (Gen 9:1–7). Moreover, the effects of sin give further impetus to the culture-making endeavor, which now must meet the challenges of human existence in the midst of creation groaning under the curse. The God-ordained institutions of family and government take on added significance to address the strife characterizing interpersonal and

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[20] James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 85–89.

[21] Sutanto, *God and Knowledge*, 92.

[22] Ibid. 67.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (April 1989): 65.

[25] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). Cited in Sutanto, *God and Knowledge*, 65–66.

[26] The phrase is Bavinck's; see Sutanto, *God and Knowledge*, 56ff.

[27] Bavinck, "Common Grace," 65.

[28] Sutanto, *God and Knowledge*, 59.

[29] Bavinck, "Common Grace," 65.

social relationships as well as the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities.[30] Even as these spheres remain essential to the pursuit of the cultural mandate, sin makes their interactions conflictual. Reinforcing their particular roles amid this friction, Bavinck writes, "God has accorded to state, home, and society the peculiar power and authority proper to each; beside them stands the church with its own government granted to it by Christ. Subjugation of the church by the state or of the state by the church are thus both condemned."[31]

As this last statement indicates, to grasp the manifold response required by the cultural mandate is already to conceive of some basic aspects of ordering life together in political community.[32] God designed creation to be developed in ways that require differentiated responsibility or, as James Skillen has described, "structured plurality."[33] In this light, a test of government's success in fulfilling its purpose is its respect for other spheres.[34] Government exhibits such deference by maintaining the conditions in which family, church, business, science, arts, and other cultural associations can flourish, rather than mistaking its mandate for theirs or permitting social dynamics that unjustly inhibit them. At the same time, government has particular tasks and authority to maintain a just public order under law, which Christians are to respect, heed, and pray for (Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–14, 17; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Tim 2:2).

This is the context in which public theology serves. As observed above about Bavinck's view of theology generally in relation to other fields, so with public theology in relation to government and other spheres concerned with the common good: "She serves them with her gifts—she can unify them and give them their proper context, and she can show how they are closely interconnected."[35] One way formation in practical public theology can do so is by helping Christians (and all citizens) develop a depth perception that recognizes a multiplicity of institutions at work in our common life. These distinctions are critical conceptually in the formation of policy and other responses. Government action may be necessary to address a given situation, but it is almost never sufficient; multiple other spheres,

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[30] In contrast to the Anabaptist tradition, Reformed theology has affirmed the legitimacy of Christians serving in the civil sphere (see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.20.4). This includes government, law enforcement, and military.

[31] Bavinck, "Common Grace," 63.

[32] See Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 23.

[33] James W. Skillen, "Witness in the Public Square," *Unio cum Christo* 1.1–2 (Fall 2015): 166.

[34] Skillen makes an argument to this effect as well, ibid.; see also Skillen, *The Good of Politics*, 124.

[35] Sutanto, *God and Knowledge*, 59.

including the family, church, and private associations, have roles to play in meeting social needs.

2. *Situational Awareness: Putting Theology in Conversation with Public Life*

Theology can serve these various actors at work in the public square by equipping Christians with a situational awareness of the theological concerns at issue in current challenges. Teaching in the following theological areas, among others, can especially help develop such a practical public theology.

Image of God

Formation in theological anthropology is particularly significant for addressing a wide range of questions today. A number of the most fundamental challenges currently confronting society relate to the nature and purpose of human beings. Proposals concerning such issues as gender identity, assisted suicide, and transhumanism contest truths articulated in the very first chapters of Genesis. They dispute the reality that we are created, in the image of God, male and female, made for each other in marriage and community. Instead, they assert a radical autonomy with respect to humanity's nature and purpose.

Opening up the fullness of the biblical teaching that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27; 9:6) reveals further implications for public life. Bavinck's interpretation of the image in three dimensions begins to illuminate this. First, all of the human person, in the fullness of the person's material and spiritual composition, images all of God. Second, both male and female image God, individually and together. Finally, the whole of humanity, throughout all human history, images God.[36]

The implications are vast. All human beings possess a created dignity that cannot be lost; human life should be protected in law and respected in all personal interactions. Racial bigotry in all its forms is repudiated. Misogyny is rejected. Views that base personhood solely on rational or other capacities are flawed; membership in the human species alone is the basis of personhood, from conception to natural death. Human beings image God in the entirety of their being, body and soul. They cannot be

[36] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 533, 554–62, 576–78. Brian Mattson notes that Bavinck is not constrained to limit the scope of the image because "all such identifications are analogical from the start" in view of his emphasis on the Creator-creature distinction; see Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 130.

reduced to the merely material, and policy ought not to disregard or deny the spiritual nature of human beings and the relevance of religion in human life and society.[37] Neither can the material dimensions of humanity be ignored; the physical well-being of our neighbors is a part of their flourishing as made in the image of God. Christians need a strong biblical understanding of the nature and purpose of human beings in order to cast a vision for God's design of what it means to be human and to call on others to reason together about these things.

Unity and Diversity

Sin festers at the seams of difference. Hateful pride preys on distinctions of race, sex, class, age, and many others. Evidence of its harm is pronounced, among other places, in deep wounds from patterns of racism.

Where affinity does not draw us together, our society struggles with difference—in politics, in communities, in the church. Here the power of Christ is displayed as it reshapes us, writes Irwyn Ince, for in Christ "contraries have been reconciled."[38] He brings about a unity in diversity in the church that is humanly inexplicable. The church is therefore called to be a picture of the eschatological community united in Christ, or what Ince calls "the beautiful community."[39]

Ince elaborates, "The ministry of reconciliation demonstrated in the local church by the gathering of people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities is the natural outworking of a rich covenantal theological commitment."[40] Unity in diversity is a gospel imperative, he says, tracing it through the Bible from Adam and Eve to Revelation,[41] where we see "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9 ESV).

In the meantime, redemption in Christ sets before us the vision of the restoration of all creation. The seams of difference we experience now are part of God's beautiful tapestry that we are to prize. "The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being," writes Bavinck. "Only humanity in its entirety … is the fully finished image, the

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[37] For example, government should not deny religious liberty. Foreign policy should recognize that religion is a perpetual factor in world affairs, contrary to secularization theory.

[38] Irwyn Ince, *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 110.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 12.

[41] Ibid. 112.

most telling and striking likeness of God."[42] This vision should set the pattern for Christians' outlook on unity, diversity, and reconciliation in the midst of public life. Unjust discrimination in policy, practice, or interpersonal relations is antithetical to it.

Stewardship

Competing demands for scarce resources are a central feature of politics and the source of great controversy. Interest-group politics, utilitarian arguments, and other strong currents figure in such disputes. The cultural mandate provides a different perspective from which to consider these questions: stewardship.

Stewardship is the exercise of responsibility at the intersection of our callings and questions of goods, resources, and capacities. It involves prudent decisions in our own spheres of influence about maintaining and equitably allotting existing resources, as well as developing new ones. In the context of representative government, citizenship in particular is a matter of responsible stewardship, including the stewardship of political freedom. Numerous biblical principles relate to stewardship in many specific contexts. Two examples are briefly mentioned here.

Stewardship applies to creation, a gift of God that humanity is meant to cultivate and enjoy (Gen 1:29–31; 2:15–16; Ps 8:6–8). The material world is not to be rejected or exploited, but used in ways that honor it and glorify God. Despite the goodness of creation, the curse of sin has affected all things. The experience of the blessings of creation and the blight of sin is uneven, and adversity is a permanent reality in this world.

Because of that reality, another aspect of stewardship is directing our resources and capacities to alleviate suffering and hardship. The people of God in the Old Testament were called to show mercy and justice to the vulnerable and dispossessed (Mic 6:8) because of God's mercy, including to themselves (Deut 10:18–19). The representative categories of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor recur, with some variation, throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Deut 14:29; Isa 10:2; Jer 7:6; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10).[43] Nicholas Wolterstorff has called these the "quartet of the vulnerable."[44] The New Testament echoes these categories (Matt 25:35–36; Jas 1:27). Christians have a responsibility to address the needs of our vulnerable

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[42] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:577.

[43] John Scott Redd, "Deuteronomy," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 143.

[44] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 75.

neighbors in the stewardship of our callings in multiple spheres, including but not limited to seeking sound policy in these areas.

Truth and Conscience

"The large moral disagreements all turn on competing descriptions," observes O'Donovan in *Desire of Nations*. "The world-shaping, cultural sins have to do with bad descriptions …. of a foetus as a piece of maternal tissue; of justice as the will of the majority, and so on. Serious moral debate cannot avoid arbitrating questions of description and so enquiring into the structures of reality."[45] A part of the church's task in each generation is to recognize and confront false testimonies about created reality.

To be equipped to do so, Christians must seek out true concepts authorized by Scripture, says O'Donovan. "Concepts disclose the elementary structures of reality."[46] They form our consciences about ideas like justice, authority, freedom, and personal identity.

A concept of justice shaped in this way, for example, is not limited to a correctional system or to merely material conditions. Instead, it is closely linked to the idea of what is right and encompasses right relations.[47] This implies that individuals in their various spheres contribute to a just society, in addition to government maintaining a just order in which all these spheres interact. Government is responsible for proximate, not ultimate, justice.[48] But temporal justice may not simply bend itself away from the arc of God's moral universe through corrupt or irresponsible use of power. Every authority on earth will be judged.

As another example, a biblically-shaped concept of personal identity is rooted in the image of God: it has a nature and purpose. It is not subject to radical redefinition that rejects this created reality. Yet false descriptions concerning identity have emerged in culture and, increasingly, in law. Following United States Supreme Court decisions redefining marriage and sex,[49] debate now concerns the freedom to speak and to act consistently

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[45] O'Donovan, *Desire of Nations*, 14.

[46] Ibid. 15. O'Donovan emphasizes this is an exegetical task governed by a disciplined hermeneutic that recognizes differences in redemptive-historical contexts, and therefore differences in application.

[47] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 258–60, 278.

[48] See John Scott Redd, "The Earth Is the Lord's," in *Set Free: Restoring Religious Freedom for All*, ed. Art Lindsley and Anne R. Bradley (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2019), 34–35.

[49] Court decisions have redefined marriage to include same-sex relationships (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, June 26, 2015) and sex discrimination in employment law to include sexual orientation and gender identity (*Bostock v. Clayton County*, June 15, 2020).

with biblical truth about marriage and about the created biological reality of sex. These questions are far reaching. They touch on the conscience rights of medical professionals to decline to be involved in gender transition surgeries. They concern the freedom of confessional organizations to maintain employee conduct standards as a part of their statement of faith. The problems with new policies related to sexual orientation and gender identity do not stop with religious organizations or individuals, however, and our concern should extend to all our neighbors. For example, privacy, safety, and equity for girls are significant issues as new gender identity policy has allowed biological males to use girls' showers and locker rooms and to compete in girls' sports.[50]

In each of these four areas and others, if public theology is to serve well, development is needed in both the scholarly arena and in church Christian education. In the academic domain, this calls for the development of *theological* reasoning concerning the principles in public issues of significance to the church or to Christians as individuals.[51] Such scholarly work can also supply Christian education resources[52] in the church for the formation of believers of all ages.

3. *A Case of Theology and Public Life: Poverty*

The process of such theological reflection requires situational awareness of specific issues in public life. Just as practical public theology recognizes multiple principles in many concerns of our common life, so it anticipates that multiple factors are often involved from the perspectives of practitioners in other fields as well. To be able to discern which principles are involved and how to apply them prudentially requires some knowledge of circumstances and policy details. For example, the biblical admonition to care for the poor is unequivocal, but *how* to obey this command today is not explicit in Scripture. Such discernment requires situational knowledge to apply biblically derived principles.

Consider the case of poverty in the United States. Investigating the nature and causes of material hardship shows that, unlike the situation in the developing world, extreme need (a lack of basic provisions for sustenance and shelter)

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[50] See Jennifer Marshall Patterson, "Preserving Religious Freedom, Pursuing the Common Good," in *Set Free*, ed. Lindsley and Bradley, 169–84. See also Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019).

[51] For example, John Scott Redd's article "The Earth is the Lord's" presents a biblical theology rationale for religious freedom.

[52] For example, see David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

is not typical of American households in poverty. Current policies have focused on the material needs of the poor and have raised living standards —an outcome for which we can be thankful, but not satisfied. Government welfare spending levels are more than enough to raise every household out of poverty—yet poverty and dependence on public assistance persist. Material hardship among poor households with children often correlates with father absence and a lack of work, even in good economic times. Most public assistance to families with children goes to single-parent households.[53]

A Christian response to poverty must see the image of God in neighbors in need. Rather than reducing those in poverty to their material needs, our response should seek their overall flourishing, including in relation to God, self, other people, and the material world.[54] Relationships, especially within the family, and purposeful activity through work are critical aspects of what it means to be human.

Yet policies have discouraged work and undermined marriage by penalizing a single mother on welfare if she marries a man with a job. Policy reforms can correct these negative dynamics in the way public assistance is structured. Meanwhile, we can pursue long-term change by striving, through churches and other ministries, to restore marriage and to prevent the relational breakdown that so often puts single mothers and their children at risk. Poverty in America goes much deeper than material need and exceeds the type of help government can provide. Churches, businesses, and nonprofit organizations all have roles to play, both in helping overcome poverty and working to prevent it.[55]

This is an example of how practical public theology approaches a challenge in public life by seeking to understand the facts, to recognize the theological principles involved, and to discern the multiple dimensions of response needed to address aspects beyond material need. It assumes the relevance of various spheres in tackling social challenges and evaluates the relative contributions each can make to the case at hand. Finally, implicit in this response is a realism that is willing to engage the actual state of affairs, in all its cumulative complexity and brokenness—both in terms of the problem itself and prior attempts to solve it (whether through policy or other efforts). A Christian response to poverty—and other challenges—is willing to begin where things are, rather than where we might wish them to be, and to persevere so that they will one day approach fuller flourishing.

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[53] Robert Rector, "How the War on Poverty Was Lost," *Wall Street Journal*, January 7, 2014.

[54] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 57–58.

[55] Ibid.

II. *Experience of Covenant Community in the Church*

The practice of public theology brings biblically informed principles and insights from the experience of covenant community in the church to bear on questions about how to order life together in political society. Gathering as God's people in the church reminds us that politics is contingent and temporal, taking place within the larger scope of redemptive history. To partake in the covenant community of the church is to have our longings shaped by the Spirit, our imaginations stretched by life in the Spirit, and our hopes for the world attuned to the Spirit's operations in common grace. This comes about through, for example, the church's preaching and teaching, ministry life, prayer habits, and watching for the work of the Spirit in common grace. This section reflects on how these contribute to the formation of a practical public theology in believers.

1. *Preaching, Teaching, and Formation in Practical Public Theology*

As a church's exegetical preaching, teaching, and formation take into account a congregation's circumstances, two general observations are relevant about the current topic. First, citizenship is a calling that includes everyone in the church. Not all will be husbands or wives, not all will have a job, but everyone is a citizen (even children)—if not of the country where the church is located, then of some other country. Second, congregational members in public service or related callings may have particular dilemmas or opportunities with respect to public life. These, too, are among the many situational contexts for which believers need to hear the Word of God for "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3).

Christian education programs in the church can be a means of formation in the elements of a practical public theology discussed here. The development of resources is needed for all ages. For example, such education is needed to equip believers with respect to public issues that pertain to the identity of confessional organizations (including churches) and to the exercise of their own callings, as new government policies present challenges to biblical convictions.[56] As another example, teaching can provide an opportunity to consider biblical principles concerning care for the poor and vulnerable, with a view to informing the church's mercy ministries.

[56] For a discussion of some implications in various callings, see Patterson, "Preserving Religious Freedom, Pursuing the Common Good."

2. *Shaping Practical Public Theology through Church Ministry*

A church's ministry life shapes believers' public theology. Outreach efforts that include evangelism and care for temporal needs express convictions about the image of God in our neighbors and the breadth of common grace. Mercy ministries habituate congregants to look to the needs of others and to take a measure of responsibility for them; the types of mercy ministries in which a church chooses to engage are instructive. Ministry principles that recognize churches' capacity to address the whole person contribute to a sense of differentiated responsibility among institutions and their relative capacities for responding to various dimensions of social challenges. A focus on relational and spiritual need, not merely material deprivation, attunes believers to both the depth of brokenness and the fullness of restoration. Effective compassion seeks the flourishing of human beings, individually and in community, aiming to restore relationships with God, self, others, and creation.[57]

A church's grounding in such ministry principles will shape how believers conceptualize ordering life together in political community to serve neighbors in need. Such principles of ministry expand the horizon of hope for restoration because they open new possibilities for addressing deeply complex challenges like drug addiction, homelessness, or prisoner recidivism. To take the time to understand these complex problems and to relate to those trapped in them is to grow dissatisfied with simplistic answers relegating these human problems solely to the material, impersonal responses typical of government programs. Complex problems require differentiated responsibility among multiple institutions and a vision of the public square as a complex space where they interact, not as the exclusive province of government.

Not only the outward-facing but also the inward-facing church ministries are significant for members' theology of public life. The fellowship and hospitality experienced within the body of Christ in a local congregation are foundational.[58] The ways that a local church body cares for its members through family challenges, financial difficulties, cultural hostility, spiritual struggle, sickness, and death inculcate a pattern for serving others in the multiple dimensions of their identity as God's image bearers. Observing, receiving, and providing this care are all formative; they nurture virtues and practices of responsibility and reciprocity that carry over into citizenship. A congregation's habits for welcoming visitors, assimilating new members,

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[57] Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*.

[58] Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

and approaching differences of background, race, and socioeconomic status all teach habits that shape individual responses to issues in the public square, as well as an imagination for how the church's role may contribute to resolving them.

Yet the experience of covenant community in the church ought also to sharpen the contrast with the world in some respects, even in differing expectations about politics itself. Augustine observed that politics is about ordering our loves to their proper objects and ends. He saw that one of the reasons politics goes off track is that humans are tempted to place inordinate hopes in it.[59] In actuality, some of the desires human beings pin on government are longings that can only be satisfied in the world to come.[60] The temporal political order is not meant to bear the burdens of such ultimacy.

3. *Corporate Prayer and Practical Public Theology*

Praying for public officials is an admonition so basic as to have grown negligible in practice. The Scriptural directive, however, is unambiguous and thorough: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior" (1 Tim 2:2). The Westminster Confession underscores "the duty of people to pray for magistrates" (WCF 23.4).

Heeding this counsel to pray shapes worshipers' outlook on the relationship of civil and divine authority and their sense of responsibility for the calling of public theology. Its regular inclusion in public worship is instructive concerning civil authorities' continual need for wisdom in their leadership and the church's perpetual dependence on God's provision for its peaceful existence in society. Moreover, habitually praying for public officials guards against episodic intercession that may be vulnerable to motivations apart from the biblical directive for intercession and thanksgiving.

Corporate prayer should also lift up those in the congregation called to public service and *everyone* in the congregation as we exercise our callings as citizens. We should pray for sound teaching and discernment in applying our faith to emerging and recurrent challenges in public life. We should ask for perseverance in our individual and corporate responsibilities to act in

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[59] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 2003), 593.

[60] See John von Heyking's *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

ways that will shape public life, including through the ministries of the church. We should ask God to raise up and sustain leaders who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before him (Mic 6:8).

4. *Watching for the Spirit's Work*

Common grace is frequently alluded to in discussions related to theology and public life, and rightly so. But at times such references can sound somewhat like invoking a law of nature. Common grace is not a mechanistic principle at work in the universe like a deist's watch in motion. It is grace, the active operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the world.[61]

As such, we should watch for it with anticipation. "We need the Spirit's guidance in our hearts and minds as we seek to identify traces of the Spirit's work in the larger creation," writes Richard Mouw.[62] In a study of Kuyper's public theology, Vincent Bacote emphasizes a responsive posture toward the Spirit's operations in common grace: "Such a pneumatological public theology ministers to the structures of creation as it attempts to respond to common grace."[63]

We need the help of the Spirit to exercise wisdom and discernment as we engage in the public process of ordering our lives in political community. That such engagement and ordering are possible owes to God's blessing. Government's provision of order and peace in a sinful world is itself a mark of common grace. To seek sound government is to desire his favor for the benefit of all, and ultimately for his glory.[64]

Conclusion

Practical public theology engages questions of how to organize life together as a political community. Forming Christians for this engagement draws on biblical doctrine and the experience of covenant community in the church. It commends biblical truth and sound reason about how God has made the world for its flourishing. Informed by the magnitude of the response to the Genesis 1:28 mandate, it fosters in believers a conception of public life that is wider than the strictly political. This enables responses to the challenges

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[61] John Murray, "Common Grace," *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 94, 96, 117.

[62] Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 28.

[63] Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 151.

[64] Murray, "Common Grace," 111–12.

of common life with the resources and capacities of spheres beyond government alone. Practical public theology forms a disposition to discern the multiple theological principles at issue in many concerns of our common life and to be attentive to multiple factors from the perspectives of other spheres. Finally, practical public theology equips Christians to recognize both the spiritual and material dimensions of challenges facing individuals and communities.

Practical public theology needs the fortitude of the gospel and the fellowship of the church. It must reckon with the battering effects of sin in all aspects of life while maintaining faith in God's grace to overcome sin, redeem lives, and restore his creation. It requires the fruit of the Spirit to exercise patience in getting to know the complex problems facing public life and perseverance in pursuing responses that address the fullness of the need. It must have the courage to stand on true, biblically authorized concepts, even when false descriptions prevail. This is the endurance that produces character, and the character that produces hope, the renewable resource of the Spirit given to the church that it might not grow weary in its service (Rom 5:4–5).

Persecution and Martyrdom: Global Debates and Christian Responses

M. CHRISTIAN GREEN

Abstract

The article examines religious persecution, in the United States and abroad, through the lens of an extreme result of persecution: martyrdom. It examines maximal and minimal definitions of martyrdom and recent claims and instances of martyrdom, both in United States law and political culture and against Christian and other religious groups around the world. The article concludes with some principles from which to discern an ethic of martyrdom and claims of martyrdom, recommending especially attention to the role of the martyr as witness.

Keywords

Religious persecution, martyrdom, law and religion, human rights, religious freedom, ethics, witness

I. *Introduction: Persecution and Martyrdom*

Attention to martyrdom has proliferated in recent years. A topic that sprang into public discussion with the putative martyrdom of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, nearly two decades ago, has since been invoked in discussions of religious persecution and religious

freedom, both domestically in the United States and globally. Over the last decade or so, research and advocacy organizations, such as the Pew Research Center, Open Doors, and others have documented rising religious restrictions and religious persecution around the world.[1] Christianity and Islam, the world's two largest religions, both of which have strong traditions of proselytizing to spread their faith in ways that can lead to opposition and even attack, suffer the most from these phenomena.[2] But religious persecution and even incidents or martyrdom also affect Buddhists, Hindus, and followers of indigenous religions and other religions around the world. Recent years have also seen rising rates of anti-Semitism across the globe.[3] Often, religious persecution comes at the hands of the state through government restrictions on religion, but some of the worst and most pernicious forms of persecution can come from social hostilities around religion, including hostilities between and among religions, as well as intra-religious persecution.[4]

Religious persecution and martyrdom may seem to be rather different topics. Not all religious persecution leads to death, and there are plenty of ways to resist religious persecution without going as far as martyrdom. Discussion of religious persecution can put the focus on both the perpetrators of persecution and its victims, whereas the invocation of martyrdom puts the focus on the subjective beliefs and experiences of victims, as well as the identity of the religious groups that surround them. Against Anglican theologian William Bramley-Moore, who claimed, "The history of martyrdom *is*, in fact, the history of Christianity itself," Christian martyrdom scholar Paul Middleton has maintained that while the assertion "cannot be

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[1] See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Global Restrictions on Religion* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, December 17, 2009); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Rising Restrictions on Religion* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, September 20, 2012); Pew Research Center, *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014); Pew Research Center, *Global Uptick in Restrictions on Religion in 2016* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2018); Open Doors, *2020 World Watch List*, https://www.opendoorsusa.org/2020-world-watch-list-report/.

[2] For more on the rights and risks associated with religious proselytism, see John Witte Jr. and Richard C. Martin, eds., *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

[3] See, e.g., the recent report of UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed. United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, U.N. Doc A/74538, September 20, 2019.

[4] The need to take into account both government restrictions on religion and those that are a by-product of social hostilities around religion has been a consistent theme of the Pew research for over a decade, including its most recent report. See Pew Research Center, *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 15, 2019).

accepted in the straightforward terms in which he understood his statement," Bramley-Moore was "not incorrect that martyrdom, or rather, the presentation of martyrdom, has played a significant role in developing Christian self-understanding throughout history."[5] The better argument, Middleton suggests, lies with recent scholars who have "pointed to the way in which martyrdom creates Christian identity."[6]

The point of the present essay is to examine what we can learn about religious persecution and religious freedom from examining the concept of martyrdom as a sort of extreme form of or response to persecution in order to articulate an ethical understanding of claims of martyrdom, religious persecution, and religious freedom more generally. The argument proceeds in several parts. First, I begin by examining what might be called "maximalist" and "minimalist" definitions of martyrdom that have been the focus of discussion in recent martyrdom literature. Second, I examine what these debates over martyrdom have to say about the outer limits of religious persecution and religious freedom, both globally and in the United States. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the ethics of invocations of religious persecution and martyrdom, particularly for Christians.

II. *Questioning Martyrdom: Maximal and Minimal Definitions*

Roman Catholic journalist and Vatican analyst John Allen Jr. published a book several years back, *The Global War on Christians*, that was widely discussed in religious freedom advocacy circles.[7] Therein, Allen articulates an extraordinarily broad definition of modern martyrdom that takes into account not only the motivations of the persecutors but also the faith of the victims. Allen notes from the start of his analysis, "Classically, the church has only recognized martyrs if they were killed *in odium fidei*, meaning 'in [explicit] hatred of the faith.'"[8] These are the classic "martyrs for the faith." But he argues strongly that this is not the complete picture, instead recommending a focus not just on the victim's faith and the perpetrator's knowledge of or hostility toward it but on what the faith of believers inspires them to do and how this can put them in dangerous situations in which death and martyrdom are more likely to occur:

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[5] Paul Middleton, introduction to *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2020), 4.

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] John L. Allen Jr., *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2013).

[8] Ibid., 13.

> The mere fact that Christians are harmed someplace does not *ipso facto* mean they were harmed because they are Christian. It's equally fallacious both to dismiss religion as a causal factor and to privilege it over others. At the same time, a one-sided focus on the motives of the perpetrators of violence can also produce a badly skewed picture.[9]

In this view, that the perpetrator of violence does not know the victim's faith should not detract from the spiritual value of the victim's willingness to risk danger in certain situations for reasons of faith.

The definition of martyrdom expands even further when Allen examines connections between martyrdom and other forms of religious persecution. Here, Allen argues,

> Because Christians today are distributed across the planet, because they are disproportionately women and nonwhite, because they often belong to other at-risk groups (such as ethnic and linguistic minorities), and because they're often found in the forefront of efforts for political and economic liberalization, the way a society treats its Christians is a fairly reliable test of its overall approach to the protections of minorities and the rule of law. To ignore threats against Christians because they're not explicitly religious is therefore, to miss the forest for the trees.[10]

Thus, he proposes, "It's not enough to consider what was in the mind of the person pulling the trigger—we also have to ponder what was in the heart of the believer getting shot."[11]

Against this expanded definition of martyrdom, Allen admits that some of the Christian organizations that catalogue Christian persecution around the world have been challenged for propagating "an overly elastic conception of 'martyrdom,' which in turn results in an inflated body count."[12] At the same time, he suggests that leading secular research organizations, such as the Pew Research Center, have been less than helpful in generating potentially better data because their purely quantitative and descriptive approach does not take into account the qualitative and normative dimensions of issues like martyrdom for people of faith. Here, Allen quotes political scientist and religious freedom researcher Allen Hertzke's observation that "because the term 'martyr' is, at least in part, theological, an organization like the Pew Forum would never touch it."[13] By contrast, Allen argues that the "Status of Global Mission" report produced by the Center for the Study

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 14.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 43.
[13] Ibid., 44.

of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary,[14] while controversial for their assertion that there are a hundred thousand Christian martyrs per year, is "consistent with recent trends in Christian theology in thinking about martyrdom, toward emphasizing not only deaths as a result of hatred of the faith but also those that result from hatred of the virtues and the works of charity inspired by the Christian faith."[15] This concern for the victim's subjective faith prompts Allen, in relaying stories of attacks on Christians, particularly Christian missionaries and relief workers around the world, that while the "motives of the attackers" may not have been religious or against the particular religious beliefs of the victim, the victims' "reasons for exposing" themselves to the risk are religious in nature in a way that makes the case for martyrdom.[16] Allen describes this class of martyrs, who die in service to the church through missionary activities, relief programs, and other good works, as of "martyrs of charity."[17]

Given the tendency of these "martyrs of charity" to conflict with prevailing state and societal norms, they have often been political martyrs as well:

> In earlier eras, Christians were put to death for specifically religious reasons, such as refusal to sacrifice to pagan gods. That still happens occasionally, but today's martyrs more often find themselves persecuted for other reasons, often related to social and political positions taken on the basis of their reading of the Gospel.[18]

The list of positions or causes can include "religious freedom, unity among the Christian churches, friendship among world religions and the transforming power of forgiveness in politics," and "opposition to war, solidarity with the poor, and the robust defense of a 'culture of life.'"[19] In this way, Allen's expanded definition of martyrdom includes not only faith and works but also political activism.

Thus, in Allen's assessment, Christians, by the nature of their faith, actions, and politics, may find themselves in harm's way and occasions of martyrdom, even if their killers do not know the faith of their victims or kill them because of it. These martyrs may be killed for pursuing a range of charitable activities and political objectives that are motivated by their faith, but which otherwise may not always be that distinguishable from the actions, politics, and

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[14] See the "Status of Global Christianity Report 2020," https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/.

[15] Allen, *The Global War on Christians*, 45.

[16] Ibid., 50.

[17] Ibid., 182.

[18] Ibid., 182–83.

[19] Ibid., 183 (quoting Daniel Philpott, "Modern Martyrs," *America* [November 12, 2012]: 13–14).

even mundane commercial pursuits of individuals and entities that are secular in nature and motivation.

Can martyrdom really be construed as broadly as Allen and some religious freedom advocates claim? Should the subjective sense of the religious identity of believers really be the only or main criterion for martyrdom, or does it require something closer to the *in odium fidei* standard that would require more objective and explicit criteria? Can this standard be expanded further to include persecutions that do not result in death? Does such a broad standard, especially where the martyr does not die but suffers some other form of discrimination or disadvantage, unacceptably equate lesser forms of suffering and persecution with death? And do such broader claims of religious persecution as "martyrdom," particularly in the political context, hyperbolize from claims of "conscience," "liberty," and "freedom"? Examination of recent scholarship on the history of Christian martyrdom can help shed light on these questions.

Allen's reflections on martyrdom in the context of global persecution of Christians can be viewed against the backdrop of the long history of martyrdom in the Christian tradition. Recently, early Christianity scholars, such as Candida Moss in her book, *The Myth of Persecution*, have raised questions about that tradition's historicity and meaning. Moss begins her analysis of martyrdom by contrasting old and new understandings of the phenomenon, lifting out several important themes along the way. The first of these is a disturbing connection between martyrdom and militarization. She describes a particular way in which martyrdom ends up being projected across and experienced by the wider faith community in a way that can heighten the sense of persecution. Of the broader perceptions regarding an attack on Coptic Christian woman in Egypt, for example, she writes,

> No longer was the attack simply an act of horrifying violence perpetrated by a terrorist group. Nor was it the unfortunate result of local religious, political, and social tensions. It became a direct and outright attack on Christianity as a whole. Rather than "turning the other cheek," the Christian community was militarized.[20]

The events in Egypt came to be symbolic of a "larger struggle between Christianity and the world" and "a rallying point for Christian identity."[21] In such cases, far from producing a posture of victimhood, persecution becomes a source of empowerment, fueling retributive retaliation in a

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[20] Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 2–3.

[21] Ibid., 3.

way that seems to be "sanctioned by God" as an act of "divinely approved self-defense."[22]

Related to this theme of militarization and power is a second theme of martyrdom as a purposeful action. Here, Moss notes a consensus among Gospel writers that Jesus was unjustly sentenced to death: "This sense of injustice sits unexpectedly comfortably with the idea that Jesus's death was purposeful. He died for our sins, after all. Yet even though Jesus gave up his life for humanity, no one reading the Gospels would come away with the impression that he deserved it."[23] By Moss's account this sense of innocence-and-injustice martyrdom became even canonical in the tradition in a way that could end up legitimizing, even recommending, a certain amount of suffering for faith. On this point, she observes of the early Christian community, "The majority started to see the suffering of the innocent as a good thing. … The death of Jesus and the promise of the resurrection became a model for Christians. In times of persecution, the answer to the question, 'What would Jesus do?' is that Jesus would die."[24]

Turning her attention to modern claims of martyrdom, Moss draws out a third and distinctly contemporary political theme of what might be called the "martyrdom of the powerful," in which claims of martyrdom are used to protect against differences of opinion perceived as threatening by or to those in power:

> It is not only the suffering and oppressed who think of themselves as persecuted. Martyrdom is easily adapted by the powerful as a way of casting themselves as victims and justifying their polemical and vitriolic attacks on others. When disagreement is viewed as persecution, then these innocent sufferers must fight—rhetorically and literally—to defend themselves. In this polarized view of the world, disagreement and conflict—even entirely nonviolent conflict—is not just a difference of opinion; it is religious persecution. The source of persecution is often explicitly demonized, labeled "evil," or cast as warfare.[25]

This self-conception of Christians as innocent sufferers of persecution—not just by those who want to kill them, but even those who simply disagree with them—becomes particularly potent, Moss notes, when it gets melded with the "now standard Christian idea that the church has always been persecuted."[26] Indeed, for some Christian conservatives in the United States,

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 5.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Ibid., 10.

Moss argues, "being an American Christian means being persecuted by others."[27]

As a historian, Moss is interested in the linkage between early and contemporary Christian invocations of martyrdom that is of most interest to her:

> Even though Jesus predicted the suffering of his followers, it is the belief that Jesus's statements were proven in the persecution of the early church that gives force to the idea that Christians are always persecuted. It is this idea, the idea that Christians are *always* persecuted, that authenticates modern Christian appropriations of martyrdom. It provides the interpretive lens through which to view all kinds of Christian experiences in the world as a struggle between "us" and "them."[28]

A problem with this view, from Moss's perspective, aside from its potential to sow the seeds of discord and division, is that it is based on stories that are largely apocryphal according to modern scholarship. Indeed, she states squarely that there is "very little evidence for the persecution of Christians" and that "there are no stories about the deaths of martyrs that have not been purposefully recast by later generations of Christians in order to further their own theological agendas."[29] By this account, martyrdom accounts may reflect not only political agendas but also theological ones.

This linkage between politics and theology leads Moss to identity a fourth theme in Christian martyrdom discourses, namely, that there is "something special about the character and nature of Christian martyrs."[30] She observes that many Christians argue that "Christian martyrs are in some way different or special … somehow intrinsically better thought of … as peaceful, passive, kind, and humble."[31] In fact, the evidence is that some martyrs were aggressive—even suicidal—in their willingness to die. This tendency was, moreover, found in Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures of the period.

Moss's view of martyrdom has been described as "minimalist,"[32] particularly for its refutation of the historical accuracy of martyrdom. In this sense, it contrasts with Allen's more "maximalist" view. However, Moss's account, while skeptical, does not wholly negate the value and significance of martyrdom as narrative. Indeed, judging from the history, she argues,

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[27] Ibid., 11.

[28] Ibid., 14.

[29] Ibid., 16–17.

[30] Ibid., 17. Daniel Philpott does provide the statistic that Christians constitute 80% of those who are persecuted for their religion worldwide. Philpott, "Modern Martyrs," 14.

[31] Moss, *The Myth of Persecution*, 18.

[32] Middleton characterizes Moss's account as on one of the "most provocatively" put accounts of early Christian persecution. Middleton, introduction, 3.

> The reason these Christians invented martyrdom stories and saw their history as a history of persecution is because then, as now, martyrdom was a powerful tool. … Martyrdom mattered to people, and the love people felt for the martyrs led to pious exaggeration and well-intentioned forgery.[33]

The problem is how the martyrdom becomes an ethical and political choice that can end up increasing conflict between Christians and others in their communities.

Of this ethical and political dimension of martyrdom, Moss writes,

> The recognition that the idea of the Christian martyr is based in legend and rhetoric, rather than in history and truth, reveals that many Christians have been and remain committed to conflict and opposition in their interactions with others, but they don't have to be. Christians can choose to embrace the virtues that martyrs embody without embracing the false history of persecution that has grown up around them.[34]

The choice by the church or individual Christians or Christian groups to embrace martyrdom narratives is neither neutral nor uniquely spiritual and theological. It has social and political implications in the world. Thus, Moss argues,

> The view that the history of Christianity is a history of unrelenting persecution persists in modern religious and political debate about what it means to be Christian. It creates a world in which Christians are under attack; it endorses political warfare rather than encouraging political discourse; and it legitimizes seeing those who disagree with us as our enemies. It is precisely because the myth of persecution continues to be so influential that it is imperative that we get the history right.[35]

Her account thus casts doubt on the idea that the "history of martyrdom is the history of Christianity," while also prompting us to ask what it means that Christians have invested so heavily in the concepts of martyrdom. This is where some contemporary problems of global religious persecution and religious freedom come into play.

III. *Religious Persecution and Religious Freedom*

When I originally began to examine the topic of martyrdom in 2015, martyrdom discourses were at a peak in the media and both popular and academic theology, particularly in response to the persecution of Christians by the

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[33] Moss, *The Myth of Persecution*, 19.
[34] Ibid., 20.
[35] Ibid., 21.

ISIS terrorist organization. Orthodox Christian writer Rod Dreher introduced an essay on the persecution of Christians in American culture with the observation, "The mass martyrdom last week of the 21 Egyptian Copts at the hands of ISIS is a sobering reminder of what real persecution looks like."[36] By contrast, progressive Anabaptist theologian and blogger Benjamin Corey, viewing the same horrific scene, asked,

> Can we stop complaining about this bogus idea that American Christians are persecuted now? … The world needs us to turn from ourselves and focus on this real persecution, because it's evil and must be exposed and stopped. However, our own self-centeredness as Americans is getting in the way of the discussion on *real* anti-Christian persecution in the world today. In fact, I would go as far as to say that it is actually distracting, offensive, and insulting to those who face *real* persecution for their faith.[37]

In the same week that Dreher and Corey were debating martyrdom in the context of United States Christianity, Canadian doctors were described as being subjected to "medical martyrdom" from a new law that required them to participate in or to facilitate by referral medical procedures, such as abortion or assisted suicide, that violated their religious beliefs or conscience.[38] The early part of 2015 was also the year after the United States Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* not to require a Christian business owner to comply with the contraceptive mandate and pay for employee contraceptive coverage under President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act, thereby raising questions about whether corporations could be martyrs.[39] It was just months before the Supreme Court's decision in the summer of 2015 to legalize same-sex marriage in the case of *Obergefell*

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[36] Rod Dreher, "Lions and Christians in America," *The American Conservative*, February 17, 2015.

[37] Benjamin L. Corey, "Please, American Christians: Can We Stop Complaining about Persecution Now?," *patheos*, February 16, 2015, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/formerly-fundie/please-american-christians-can-we-stop-complaining-about-persecution-now/; for further analysis of Dreher and Corey on these points, see Eric C. Miller, "Are American Christians Persecuted?," *Religion Dispatches*, February 20, 2015.

[38] Wesley J. Smith, "The Coming of Medical Martyrdom," *First Things*, February 20, 2015; see also Sebastian Gomes, "When Death Is at the Doorstep: Martyrdom and Euthanasia in the Church," *Salt + Light Media*, February 12, 2015; Wesley J. Smith, "The Clear and Present Danger of Medical Martyrdom," *Legatus*, November 2, 2015.

[39] *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores*, 573 U.S. 682 (2014). See also Karen Swallow Prior, "Hobby Lobby: The First Martyr under Obamacare?," *Christianity Today*, January 2013; Ilya Shapiro, "Symposium: Mandates Make Martyrs out of Corporate Owners," *SCOTUSblog*, February 24, 2014; Mark Cameron, "When Business Becomes a Martyr," *The Arkansas Traveler,* February 20, 2013.

v. Hodges.[40] Kim Davis, the clerk of court in one Kentucky county, who refused to marry same-sex couples, came to be seen as a martyr by some Christian groups, even as other Christian groups and the wider culture challenge that characterization.[41] In 2015, perceptions of state coercion by some traditional and conservative religious professionals and purveyors of goods were increasingly prompting them to complain of threats to religious freedom that were being described as a new form of martyrdom.

At the same time, the atrocities against Christian groups around the world continued to draw attention. Indeed, 2015 was said to be a peak year for Christian persecution at the time.[42] At the same time, the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar was also spawning atrocities against Muslim groups, particularly the Rohingya Muslims. In many cases, the implications and after-effects of the global religious persecution seen in 2015 continue to reverberate to this day. But even at the time, there were also growing concerns about interpreting these situations—the Christian-Muslim violence in the Central African Republic being one prominent example—in ways that were predominantly or exclusively about religion and religious persecution. There was a growing sense that such religious interpretations might themselves "religionize" conflicts that were actually about a range of factors besides religion, and that when these conflicts were "religionized," fuel was added to the fire of conflagrations in a way that could be intractable and difficult to extinguish.[43]

One of the outgrowths of this concern about "religionizing" conflict has been a realization that religious persecution has a particular perniciousness when its victims are minorities. The minority status may hinge on religion itself, but it may also involve the confluence or "intersectionality" of religion and other factors, such as nationality, ethnicity, language, and political or economic status. In recent years, there has been a realization that minority

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[40] *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ___ (2015); see also Ted Scheinman, "Straight Christians and the New Language of Martyrdom," *Pacific Standard Magazine*, July 1, 2015.

[41] See, e.g., Ekum Sohal, "Kim Davis Is No Martyr," *Fordham Observer*, February 27, 2015; David Uberti, "The Media Has Made Kim Davis a Conservative Martyr, Missing the Bigger Picture," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September 4, 2015; Ana Marie Cox, "Kim Davis Is Not a Christian Martyr: The County Court Clerk Deserves to Be in the Clink," *The Daily Beast*, September 4, 2015; Douglas Boin, "Actually, Kim Davis Is a Martyr," *Huffington Post*, September 8, 2015; Andrea Peyser, "Kim Davis Is a Martyr for Refusing to Issue Same-Sex Marriage Licenses," *New York Post*, September 13, 2015. This is just a sampling of the many opinion and editorial pieces written about Kim Davis.

[42] William J. Cadigan, "Christian Persecution Reached Record High in 2015, Report Says," *CNN*, January 17, 2016.

[43] See M. Christian Green, "What's 'Religious' about the CAR Crisis?," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, September 8, 2014.

groups may be especially in need of protection in a process that protects them in ways that prescind from doctrinal and other differences to do with religion itself. However, there has also been a problem in various locales of what may be described as "majorities acting like minorities," particularly in places like Sri Lanka, where Buddhism enjoys constitutional protection, and Malaysia, where Malay Muslims are a protected group under the constitution.[44] The "majority minority" problem is also seen in places like Russia and some other Eastern European and Near Eastern nations, where the Orthodox Christian Church enjoys legal and political protection.[45]

The "majority minority" problem has also figured into United States religious persecution discussions, of course, particularly in ongoing debates about same-sex marriage, particularly the "wedding cake" controversies, which have now encompassed florists, photographers, invitation printers, and other vendors of wedding-related goods and services.[46] In such cases, traditional and conservative Christians have claimed religious freedom and freedom of expression exemptions from laws that require nondiscrimination in the marketplace. Even more, these Christian objectors to same-sex marriage have claimed to suffer from a "stigma" placed on their objection, a stigma that they analogize to accusations of racism. In fact, in the recent United States Supreme Court decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*,[47] the decision hinged not on the issue of same-sex marriage itself, but on the "animus" shown by two commissioners to the baker's case against providing a cake to a same-sex couple.[48] Accusations of "stigma" and "animus" are, of course, serious charges, as they can lead to other forms of persecution. The question is how to balance legitimate claims of religious freedom against the principle of nondiscrimination against others.

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[44] See M. Christian Green and Monica Duffy Toft, "Freedom of Religion or Belief Across the Commonwealth: Hard Cases, Diverse Approaches," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16.4 (2018): 19–33.

[45] For a good discussion of nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy, see Jocelyne Cesari and Kristina Stoeckl, "Lunch Series on Religion and Nationalism: Russia," Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, April 8, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaIsZDThqzw.

[46] For discussions of persecution and "martyrdom" in connection with the wedding vendor cases, see, e.g., "Don't Make Martyrs of Bakers," *The Register-Guard*, July 12, 2015; Vikki Reich, "Rise of the Modern Martyr: The Trouble with Explaining Kim Davis to My Kids," *Star Tribune*, September 15, 2015; Ilya Shapiro, "Kim Davis Is No Martyr, but Barronelle Stutzman Is," *SCOTUSblog*, September 8, 2015.

[47] *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 138 S. Ct. 1719 (2018).

[48] Tom Gjelten, "Court Sees 'Hostility' to Religious Beliefs in Case of Baker and Same-Sex Couple," *National Public Radio*, June 5, 2018.

IV. *Conclusion: Religious Freedom, Religious Persecution, and the Ethics of Martyrdom*

From the concerns about the global incidence of religious pluralism, the history of Christian martyrdom, and contemporary concerns about religious persecution in the United States and abroad, it is possible to extract some principles for considering the ethics of martyrdom in connection with religious persecution.

1. *Beyond Belief*

First of all, as Allen's account of global persecution of Christians suggests, we must take into account forms of persecution that encompass not only beliefs but even actions and political stances that may challenge and confront the surrounding society and culture. Religious freedom, particularly as understood in international human rights laws on the point, necessarily extends to the many ways in which religious belief actualizes itself in the world. However, when belief extends into action and politics, there is inevitably risk involved. As a noted New Testament theologian once said to me in responding to a question about how to understand and address martyrdom in relation to contemporary forms of religious persecution, "There will be martyrs."[49] In legal terms, the "strict liability" for persecutors who happen to visit affliction on people of faith may necessarily be accompanied by some " assumption of risk," to invoke another legal doctrine, of reaction by those people of faith. This is, perhaps, the meaning of faith.

2. *Narratives That Divide*

Moss's key concern about martyrdom narratives had to do with their power to divide groups and nations in sometimes violent and militaristic ways. As she observes, "The language of martyrdom and persecution is often a language of war. It forces a rupture between 'us' and 'them' and perpetuates and legitimizes an aggressive posture toward 'the other' and 'our enemies,' so that we can 'defend the faith.'"[50] Likewise, Middleton observes,

> Martyr stories are often set in a context of war, even if that war is metaphorical and metaphysical. … Death is normally interpreted within a framework of a wider conflict ….This conflict may be regional, global, or even cosmic. The martyr becomes a symbol of a community's desires and hopes, or for that matter, their terrors and fears."[51]

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[49] The scholar was Luke Timothy Johnson of Emory University in delivering a wonderful online webinar for Emory alumni on trends in the study of New Testament and the Bible.

[50] Moss, *The Myth of Persecution*, 14.

[51] Paul Middleton, *Martyrdom: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 16.

In this way "religionization" of conflict can transform particular narratives into self-fulfilling prophecies.

3. *Animus and Stigma*

The concerns about animus and stigma as forms of religious persecution seem destined to remain with us a bit longer, at least in the context of American constitutional law of religion and state. There are recent decisions on the point and more "wedding cake" controversies in the legal pipeline. Another term that is commonly heard in the same voice as "animus" and "stigma" is that of "bigotry." In contemporary American argot, the term "bigotry" has particular connections to racism and the history and legacy of slavery in the United States, acknowledged by many today as our nation's "original sin." But, interestingly, the term *bigot* originally had a specifically religious meaning. Though there is a range of theories as to the term's origin, the term bigot, derived from Old and Middle French, is said to have referred to a "sanctimonious person" or a "religious hypocrite."[52] At later points, the term is said to have referred to people "overly devoted to their own religious opinion."[53] So, assertions or implications that someone is a bigot, which is how some Christians have taken animus or stigma toward their beliefs about sexuality and other concerns, can be taken as an attack on their faith or the genuineness in adhering to it and thus as a form of religious persecution.[54] Whether such beliefs can coexist with broader social principles of equality and nondiscrimination in a pluralistic society remains a question, but this is not to deny the perception of persecution to which these controversies can give rise.

4. *Equality and Nondiscrimination*

Indeed, how to balance religious freedom with principles of equality and nondiscrimination remains a concern within the very international human rights laws that protect from discrimination on the basis of religion and belief. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which is the key document undergirding modern international human rights law, recognizes the right to "freedom of thought, conscience, and religion."[55] But it also

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[52] See Anatoly Lieberman, "Nobody Wants to Be Called a *Bigot*," *OUPblog*, February 24, 2011.

[53] See "Bigot," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/bigot.

[54] For an excellent discussion of "bigotry" in law and religion, see Linda C. McClain, *Who's the Bigot? Learning from Conflicts over Marriage and Civil Rights Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[55] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810 at 71 (1948), art. 18.

contains several specific guarantees of equality and nondiscrimination that are understood to overarch its other provisions. Its preamble grounds the entire treaty in recognition of the "inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" and the "dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women."[56] Its very first article proclaims, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."[57] A further article on equality and nondiscrimination under law provides,

> All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.[58]

Clearly, all of these equality and nondiscrimination provisions apply to religious freedom and freedom from persecution, but they apply equally to those who might suffer harm and discrimination from the religious views of others. How to balance these principles remains a great theological and political challenge of our era.

5. *Minority Protection*

In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its successor documents on religious freedom, the United Nations has issued a Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities.[59] As noted above, globally, religious minority status often coincides with national, ethnic, and linguistic minority status. The ways in which differences between groups have given rights to conflict around the world in recent decades, particularly where they involve majority group oppression of minorities, has raised awareness of the need to support the protection of minorities of all sorts, but especially religious minorities, who are often at particular risk in times of conflict. For example, Christians

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[56] UDHR, preamble.

[57] UDHR, art. 1.

[58] UDHR, art. 7.

[59] See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, esp. art. 18; Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, G.A. res. 36/55, 36 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 171, U.N. Doc. A/36/684 (1981); Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, G.A. res. 47/135, annex, 47 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 210, U.N. Doc. A/47/49 (1993).

around the world have reacted with horror at the near extirpation of Christian communities in the Near East in light of the ancient roots of Christianity in the region and the detrimental effect on long-standing Christian communities. There is also intrareligious persecution. Ahmadi Muslims, for instance, experience persecution at the hands of other Muslims in communities around the world.[60] Drawing on the plight of minorities can be an effective way of generating response and relief from within and without the faith.[61] The focus can then be on remedies for injustice rather than doctrines that divide. Particularly in light of the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews that was the impetus for so much of the post–World War II international human rights regime, the persecution of religious minorities has struck chords of injustice that have caused rallying cries the world over.

6. *The Need for Equity*

Discussion of discrimination and persecution, particularly of minorities, tends often to focus on equality, equal protection, and equal treatment under the law. Equality is the standard trope for addressing these problems in legal circles, with an eye to doing justice for all concerned. But there is another concept of justice that seems equally important in these situations, particularly in addressing the problem of "majorities acting like minorities." It is an ethical concept with ancient vintage in Christian theology and ethics, borrowed from the Greco-Roman tradition: the concept of justice as equity. The philosopher Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, described equity as the highest form of justice and the "equitable man" as one who is "no stickler for his rights in a bad sense, but tends to take less than his share though he has the law on his side."[62] In other words, the question is not what one has a right to do, but what is right to do. There is resonance here also with Paul's discussion of the strong and the weak in Romans 14, where he counsels,

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[60] See Muhammad Haron, "Africa's Muslim Authorities and Ahmadis: Curbed Freedoms, Circumvented Legalities," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16.4 (2018): 60–74. On the broader context of intra-Muslim discrimination, see also Ahmed Salisu Garba, "The Prospects and Problems of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim Majority Communities," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 16.4 (2018): 47–59.

[61] For further discussion, see M. Christian Green, "Law, Religion, and Religious Minorities: Reflections on International Human Rights Law and Global Islam," in *Minority Religions under Irish Law: Islam in National and International Context*, ed. Kathryn O'Sullivan (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 7–33.

[62] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.10, trans. William David Ross, http://nothingistic.org/library/aristotle/nicomachean/nicomachean38.html.

> As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. … Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? … Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God …. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.[63]

In contexts where majority religious groups enjoy constitutionally protected status or social advantage, that religion may need to refrain from using its majority status to enact forms of religious persecution on others or even to claim persecuted status itself. This sort of humility may be required of religious majorities wherever they occur and when they feel threatened by social and cultural changes.

7. Martyrdom as Witness

Modern scholars of martyrdom, Moss and Middleton included, recommend that we look beyond the facts and circumstances of death to other functions and meanings of martyrdom. Middleton notes the connection of the word martyr to the Greek term *martys*, meaning witness in a trial.[64] There are twenty references to witnesses and witnessing in the Acts of the Apostles, which operates as a "go forth" manual for the early Church. Acts 5:32 proclaims, with many other passages throughout the book, "And we are witnesses to these things." Acts 6:20 references the time "when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed." Stephen was, of course, Christianity's first martyr but not the last. To reconceive martyrdom as witness, not as unto death, but as living witness, requires that we understand bearing witness not just as a passive stance, but also as active and ongoing engagement with a world of differences and divisions that may be hostile. Martyrdom and narratives of martyrdom may be the outer limit of response to religious persecution, but martyrdom is not the only possibility. In the introduction to their anthology of essays on religious persecution, political scientists and religious freedom scholars Daniel Philpott and Timothy Shah observe that persecuted Christians are typically "not inert, passive victims" but instead exhibit "creativity, deliberation, and agency" as they "engage and respond to the repression they face."[65] Indeed, they describe Christians as manifesting a "creative pragmatism" in the face of persecution. They argue,

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[63] Romans 14:1, 10, 13, 19 (RSV).

[64] Paul Middleton, "Creating and Contesting Christian Martyrdom," in *The Wiley Blackwell Guide to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Middleton, 25.

[65] Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, *Under Caesar's Sword: How Christians Respond to Persecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2.

"The pragmatic, improvisational character of these efforts does not negate their also being creative, courageous, nimble, and anchored in a long-term theological conviction that a future day of freedom will come."[66]

From these points we can discern the elements of an ethic of response to religious persecution, up to and including martyrdom. Such an ethic will take into account that religious faith extends not only to belief, but also to actions and even prophetic political positions that will often be challenging to state and society. This ethic will ideally avoid stoking the fires of conflict with narratives that divide between "us" and "them." Such an ethic will be acutely aware of the problems of animus and stigma, but it will avoid the too-easy claims of both when applied to victims and perpetrators. In contexts of religious pluralism, such an ethic will seek maximal equality in the enjoyment of religious liberty, but it will balance this against the need to avoid discrimination against others in their enjoyment of fundamental rights. Such an ethic will seek to respect and reflect the growing global consensus regarding the need to protect religious and other minorities, and those of majority status may be called to embody some justice as equity in refraining from insisting too heavily on their rights, so as not to be sticklers or stumbling blocks to those of other faiths and persuasions. Above all, it should involve a reconstruction of martyrdom away from death and in the direction of its original meaning of witness. The recent rise of religious restrictions and outright persecution against Christians and other groups around the world may make some martyrs, but they will also need witnesses. There will be martyrs—but there will also be witnesses.

[66] Ibid., 3.

Hope for Religious Freedom for All in China[1]

BOB FU

Abstract

What theological foundation can best procure, promote, and protect religious freedom for all? If obstacles to securing the peaceful public manifestation of religious faith in the context of the diverse worldviews in the "public square" depend on the state, however, what is next? In China, the Communist Party routinely uses persecution and other tyrannical tactics to eliminate the expression of religious beliefs, making religious freedom appear out of reach. Nevertheless, research projects the demise of communism in China and increased Christianization and democratization. If this transition takes place, a contextualization of principled pluralism, *baorong duoyuan*, offers the best theoretical, practical foundation for religious freedom for all faiths in China's future.

Keywords

Religious freedom, persecution, China, principled pluralism, communism, Christianization, baorong duoyuan

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[1] This article is adapted from excerpts and revisions from two chapters (two and five) to be included in a forthcoming book, used by permission of Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, in part, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, and religion."[2] Although "everyone" may hope for and even theoretically have this right, not everyone has it in practice, nor does everyone agree on exactly what "freedom of thought, and religion" entails.

Religious freedom may be defined in multifaceted ways and interpreted from the perspective of history, culture, ethnicity, or nationality and in light of political and legal terms. The Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) section of the UDHR reads in full,

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.[3]

Religious freedom can only be actualized or achieved in Timothy Shah's judgment when the state fully guarantees its private as well as public dimensions, including

> the freedom to pray, to worship, to commune with one's fellows of like mind and heart in the private practice of faith. But it is also the freedom to bear witness to one's beliefs and commitments, to be visibly religious in public life, to associate freely based on religion, and peacefully to encounter others with differing views on a basis of equality. It is the freedom to organize and act politically, to vote, to make arguments about public policy, and to legislate, based on one's religious beliefs, consistent with principles of universal justice toward others.[4]

Abraham Kuyper's sphere sovereignty promoting principled pluralism provides the foundation for my proposed theory to ensure religious freedom in China. It maintains that as a feature of the created order, God ordained distinct spheres of authority, with each retaining a purpose for existence and a unique right to exist. Figure 1 portrays the vertical interrelationships between God and his creation in human society with societal relationships existing between the horizontally portrayed spheres.

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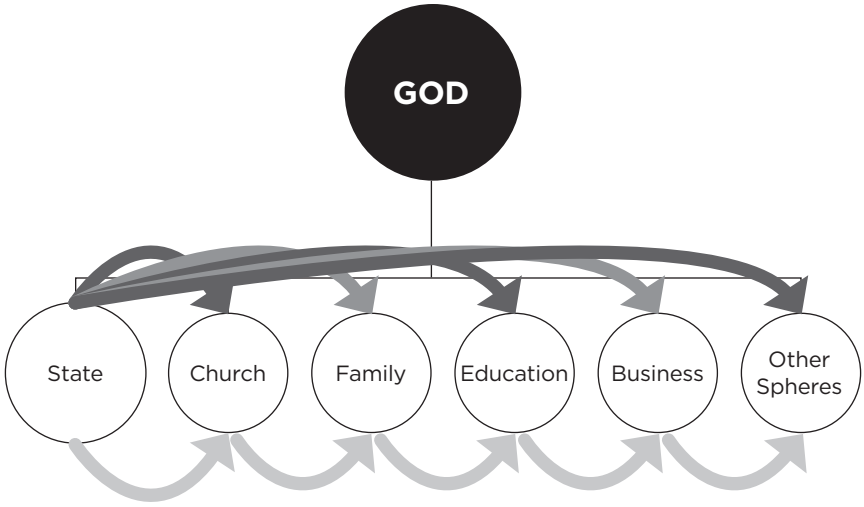
[2] "Article 18," in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948, United Nations, https://archives.un.org/sites/archives.un.org/files/UDHR/udhr.pdf.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Timothy Shah, *Religious Freedom, Why Now? Defending an Embattled Human Right* (Princeton: Task Force on International Religious Freedom of the Witherspoon Institute, 2012), vi–vii.

Figure 1. Interrelationships between Kuyper's Spheres[5]



Each sphere interrelates with the others as it functions in society within the designated boundaries that separate them.[6] Principled pluralism draws numerous concepts from the foundational notion of sphere sovereignty. It proposes that instead of society being constructed by autonomous individuals independent from each other, organically related social groups create a society. Social groups and structures exist independently of and prior to the intervention of the state.

Herman Dooyeweerd argues that the state could correctly explain the "right and might" nature of its role. He defines the state as a legal institution of government grounded on the historical foundation of a monopolistic organization of power inside a specific geographical area.[7] Figure 2 shows that Dooyeweerd advanced Kuyper's construction of a social order from God's creation perspective.

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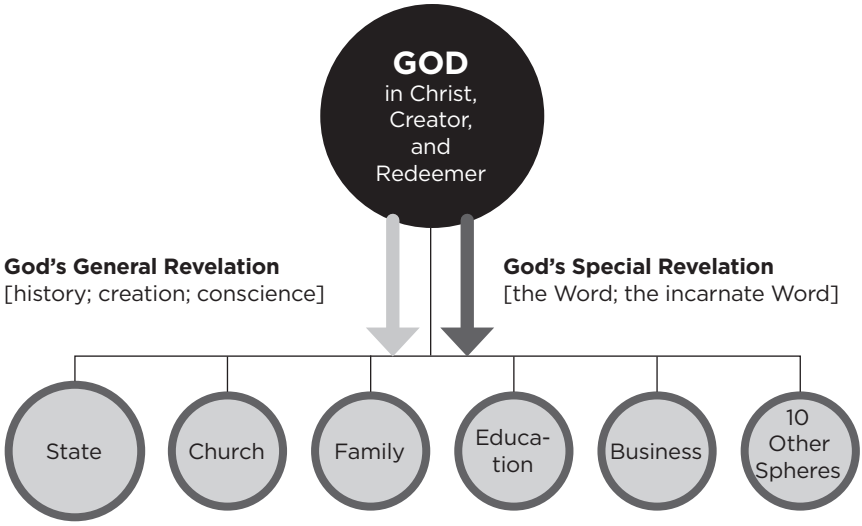
[5] Original figure developed and designed from information retrieved from Corwin Smidt, "The Principled Pluralist Perspective," in *Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views*, ed. P. C. Kemeny (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 136.

[6] Ibid., 136.

[7] Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 215.

Figure 2. Dooyeweerd's Perception of God's Revelations[8]



Responses from unregenerated and regenerated individuals vary, contingent upon responses to God's two revelations.

Dooyeweerd further developed the foundation for principled pluralism in the context of legitimate authority, especially the sphere of the state. He comprehensively and systematically expounded the task of each sphere, the norms or principles governing them, and how each sphere should relate to the other spheres.[9] Kuyper and Dooyeweerd concur on the concept of a limited, public-interest state.[10]

On the one hand, the state is neither capable of making, nor designed to make judgments on internal religious matters such as moral discipline or doctrine, nor of taking part in ecclesiastical deliberations; nor is the church able or designed to judge state matters or deliberations. On the other hand, the two spheres must work together and cooperate in the exercise of public justice, including the protection of religious freedom.

In exceptional scenarios, the role of the state extends to some allowance of conditional interference in other spheres. The state maintains the right to

[8] Figure based on *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461–63.

[9] Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, 102–5.

[10] Jonathan Chaplin, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of the State and Civil Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), ch. 8. Also, see, Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 197.

safeguard harmony between different spheres and protect justice for all, especially for vulnerable groups and minorities in society. The state's identity includes a combination of justice and power. Alternatively, power may be foundational but only for promoting justice as the goal.[11] This constitutes the state's unique, irreducible role compared to that of other social institutions.

Jonathan Chaplin adds, however, "The coercive power at the foundation of the State exists not for its own sake but only to sustain the State in realizing its definitive destination, which is the discharge of its distinctive task of advancing public justice." He explains that the state not only reflects a "juridically qualified community" but also constitutes "a territorial public legal community."[12] James Skillen, who initially employed the term "principled pluralism," also expanded this concept.[13] Among other things, principled pluralism claims that the state's responsibility includes recognizing and protecting every individual as well as each valid human vocation, institution, and organization.

Whether someone is an atheist, a Christian, or a hedonist is almost always demonstrated in associational contexts, such as the family, the church, or other faith or nonfaith institutions, such as school, political party, and state. Conversely, contextual pluralism refers to a person's sexual, race, and national identity. However, being American, French, Hispanic, Italian, or South African does not necessarily imply associational or directional pluralism, which is not contingent upon individual reasoning or choices.[14]

Contextual pluralism does not itself guarantee that associational or directional pluralism will be respected by the state or other bodies. Culturally plural countries such as China, Iran,[15] and even Israel, where one monolithic directional ideology or religion or a belief such as communism, Islam, or

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[11] Jonathan Chaplin, "Dooyeweerd's Theory of Public Justice: A Critical Exposition" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 1983), 9.

[12] Ibid., 186.

[13] James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984).

[14] Today, when a nation-state or ethnicity (contextual pluralism) comparatively or exclusively identifies itself with one monistic social structure (associational pluralism) under a solitary worldview (directional pluralism), this endangers basic human rights and religious freedom of minority groups. This is true where the state imposes one uniform, national ideological or religious identity for all its citizens, including in some communist, Islamic, Buddhist, and even Jewish countries or states. See General Assembly, United Nations, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm.

[15] *2017 Annual Report Overview*, The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017%20Annual%20Report%20Overview.pdf. Since 1998, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has listed China and Iran as CPCs (countries of particular concern), because they engage in or tolerate serious violations of religious freedom.

Judaism is legally enshrined or promoted by the state as its national identity,[16] often violate the universal principles of religious freedom and human rights. Some exceptions can be noted. For example, in a monolithic theocratic situation, as in Israel during Old Testament times, ethnic Jews (contextual pluralism) were perceived as almost identical to religious Jews (directional pluralism) and associated with its institutions, such as the temple (associational pluralism).

Diana Eck stresses that in its diverse relationships, pluralism simultaneously creates challenges and enhances life as it incites individuals to choose between contending goals, obligations, principles, and virtues.[17] To promote a spirit of toleration, Tom Driver suggests abandoning strong religious truth-claims: unless Christians divest themselves of theological requirements (salvation and liberation) for public behavior, they will fail to rid the world of the remnants of the formal political alliance between church and state.[18] If this were the case, however, in restraining the public expression of the core conviction of religions, how could a democratic society effectively protect freedom of religion or belief in accordance with international norms?

To discuss this question challenges Driver's exclusive approach, while sharing some of his legitimate concerns. For example, the risk of religious intolerance and conflict exists if the state endorses or establishes one religion, or belief, or nonbelief over another. Nevertheless, if truth-claim religions were to self-censure because of institutional and societal constraints, this could lead to religious relativism. Under *baorong duoyuan*, the state is called to treat every religion, or belief, or nonbelief system impartially. This guarantees that in a post-communist democratic pluralistic society, freedom for all would exist equally and fairly in public and private.

Christians should agree in principle to engage in dialogue without compromising truth-claims to facilitate a covenant partnership with God and others. Not doing so limits the ability of citizens with diverse beliefs to understand and communicate. Under God's common grace, as members of a free and equal citizenry in a democratic, pluralistic society, the state, for the sake of protection of religious freedom for all should encourage associations in every context, religious or nonreligious, to contribute to the common

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[16] Lahav Harkov, "Israeli Ministers Approve Controversial Jewish State Bill," *Jerusalem Post*, May 7, 2017, http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Ministers-approve-controversial-Jewish-State-bill-489972.

[17] Diane L. Eck, "'A New Religious America': Religious Freedom as a Human Right," *Issues of Democracy* 6.1 (November 2001): 15.

[18] Tom E. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).

good. Christians and those professing different beliefs should not prevent others from expressing and sharing their diverse beliefs. It is productive for everyone to engage individuals in dialogue without violence and to learn from one another. Talking with and learning from others about different beliefs permits sharing and increases understanding for all.

Principled pluralism protects diverse expressions of belief and asserts that the primary role and authority of the civil government sphere, under God's common grace, is not one of a law enforcement officer. Freedom of religion is especially rooted in conscience. Christians in authority should protect the religious freedom of those with the same beliefs and other beliefs and practices, including those adhering to different (denominational) positions. Christians in authority should also ensure freedom for those professing beliefs incompatible with biblical law and teachings. This should even extend to those in conflict with or contrary to Christianity, including individuals practicing cultic or pagan religions.

In principled pluralism, no one religious, nonreligious, or antireligious belief should supersede another in the state. Defending religious freedom based on biblical guidelines and ascertaining that obedience to God's law supremely matters is a criterion for political and social freedoms and a deterrent to religious persecution. As Skillen argues, the true nature of religious freedom requires that the state has the right neither to determine religious limits nor to predefine religion.[19]

As the political, economic, cultural, and religious conditions in China are not yet as they would be in a Western democracy, the question arises as to how *baorong duoyuan* could help promote, protect, and preserve religious freedom for all. The pattern of state supremacy and official orthodoxy exists in China under a communist state that dictates that religions operate under the religious policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

China's constitution declares that its citizens shall enjoy "freedom of religious belief,"[20] but despite this guarantee, the state still regards any religious activities conducted outside the CCP's policies not only as heterodox in ideology but also as implying abnormal and illegal activities.[21] Religious

[19] Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment,* 119.

[20] Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China states, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief" (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1982), http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html.

[21] Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 191.

groups outside an approved and sanctioned list[22] become subject to persecution[23] and legal prosecution.[24]

Throughout China's history of diverse dynasties, the political structure of imperial authoritarianism routinely challenged the religious freedom of Chinese citizens. Conflict between ruling authorities and religions in China has persisted throughout most of the imperial era and into the present.[25] Currently, amid ongoing reports of persecution of certain religions and in spite of attempts to justify its opposition to religious freedom, the CCP claims that hostile foreign forces use religions to permeate Chinese society and win over the population. Jonathan Chao confirms that the relationship between the state and religion in China has traditionally been one of supremacy of the state over religion.[26]

During the Dynastic period, the emperor determined which religions to promote, tolerate, control, or suppress. Figure 3 depicts the state-religion relationship throughout the Dynastic period.

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[22] Jason Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant: Protestant Resilience under Chinese Communist Party Rule," in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church–State Tensions*, ed. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), 122–48 (124). World religions like Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam are considered "heterodox" in relation to Marxist "orthodoxy," but may conduct their religious activities as long as these are under the supervision and control of the state.

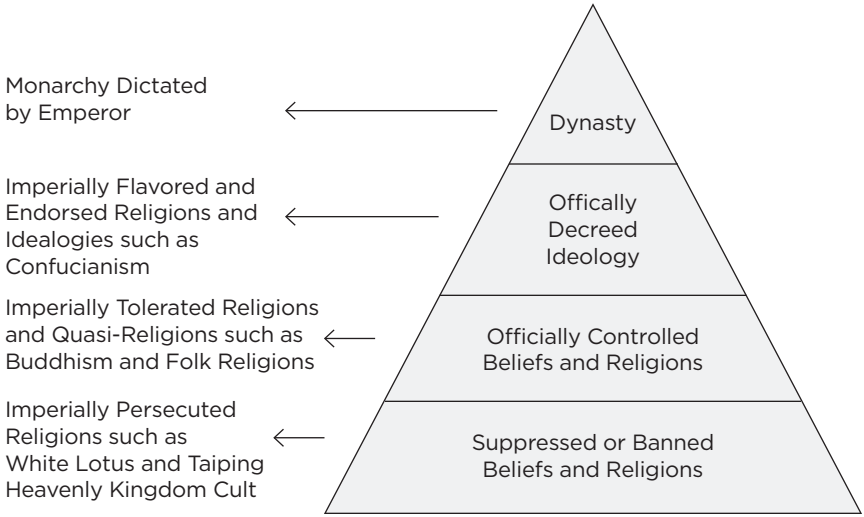
[23] Even those on the approved list, however, were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). See Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant."

[24] All groups outside the CCP's list are declared illegal; nevertheless, some are tolerated while those designated as "evil cult" groups are subject to legal prosecution. See Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant."

[25] In the history of Christianity in China, in three brief periods the church and state enjoyed relative harmony. The Nestorians experienced broad acceptance in China for 210 years until annihilated in AD 845 after heavy persecution against Buddhism by the Confucians in political power during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). The second peaceful period occurred when the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1600) moved into China in the late sixteenth century, after which Catholicism flourished for nearly a hundred years. The last period of harmony was between 1911 and 1949, from Sun Yat-sen's revolutionaries establishing the Republic of China to the CCP taking power in mainland China. See Jonathan Chao, "The Gospel and Culture in Chinese History," in *Chinese Intellectuals and the Gospel*, ed. Samuel Ling and Stacey Bieler (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 10–17.

[26] Jonathan Chao, *Church and State in Socialist China, 1949–1988* (London: Oxford Center for Mission Studies, 1989), 8.

Figure 3. State-Religion Relationship in Dynastic China[27]



On October 1, 1949, when the CCP established the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Party designated atheism as the state's official ideology.[28] Despite reasons for challenging the concept that atheism could legitimately be regarded as a type of religion,[29] communism and atheism both aim to weaken the influence of traditional religion.[30] C. K. Yang argues that in CCP schools in China, as well as via internal circulars and intermittent propaganda campaigns, CCP theoreticians have reinforced atheism as a Marxist orthodoxy.

Document No. 6, issued by the State Council in February 1991, and Document No. 19, which the Party Central issued in March 1982, reinforce China's religious policy.[31] Despite the claim of religious freedom for Chinese citizens, it includes neither propagation outside approved places for

[27] Figure created and designed from information I retrieved from numerous references, including Chao, *Church and State in Socialist China*; Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

[28] Chao, *Church and State*.

[29] Nina Weiler-Harwell, *Discrimination against Atheists: A New Legal Hierarchy among Religious Beliefs* (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly, 2011), 110.

[30] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 58.

[31] Mickey Spiegel, *China: State Control of Religion* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1977).

religious activities nor the right to establish churches according to religious convictions.[32]

Since April 1996, the state has intensified its campaign to "make religion compatible with socialism," to enforce registration, and to terminate all religious activities not approved by registration.[33] Jinghao Zhou notes that the CCP carried out "monitoring and regulating [of] all religions,"[34] with the intent of ostracizing Chinese religious organizations and foreign influence. This effort contributed to China's contemporary state-religion relationship.

China currently considers religious activities practiced outside of state control or patriotic organizations heterodox in ideology and constitute "illegal religious activities" subject to prosecution or legalized persecution. The Chinese government requires that the Three-Self Movement[35] accept

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[32] In his detailed interpretation of Article 36, Li Weihan, former Minister of the CCP's United Front Working Department, the CCP's chief religious policy-making body, states, "Every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion, and also the freedom not to believe in religion. Within a particular religion, every citizen has the freedom to believe in this or that sect." See Beatrice Leung and William Liu, *Chinese Catholic Church in Conflict, 1949–2001* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 2004), 21. So as long as they supported the CCP, monks, Taoists, priests, or pastors would be considered friends of the state. The CCP's policy of religious freedom appears to be only a political ploy.

[33] The policy initiatives were set forth by Jiang Zemin, China's president and Chinese Communist Party secretary-general in November 1993 at a national conference on United Front work. At the 1996 Fourth Plenum of the Eighth National People's Congress, Premier Li Peng echoed the same themes. He cited Document No. 19 of 1982, *The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period*, which offered a corrective to the Cultural Revolution policy of severe repression by advocating the cooptation of believers that they might serve socialist construction, and Document No. 6 of 1991, *Circular from Party Central and the State Council Concerning Certain Problems in Further Improving Religious Work*. The latter was the first to mention adaptation, to espouse registration as a key supervisory mechanism, and to address the practical realities of implementing policy. Peng also referred to two 1994 sets of government regulations, No. 144, *Regulations on the Supervision of the Religious Activities of Foreigners in China*, and No. 145, *Regulations Regarding the Management of Places of Religious Activity*. On March 1, 1997, at the opening of the National People's Congress, Peng again referenced the need for religious groups to adapt to socialist society. See Samuel Wolfe, "CRS Report for Congress," CRS 3, August 17, 2000, "https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20000817_RS20655_fbf5fa1f602de4bed8519b70894db86b4e03884c.pdf.

[34] Jinghao Zhou, *China's Peaceful Rise in a Global Context: A Domestic Aspect of China's Road Map to Democratization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 173.

[35] M. E. Sharpe, *Chinese Law and Government* (Abingdon, UK: T&F Informa, 2003), 5. Currently, the Chinese government requires not only that the Three-Self Movement accept the CCP's leadership but that each church must register with the state. Those conducting individual religious activities must report these to the Three-Self Movement's local committee. Religious leaders must also report all religious activity locations to the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs. In addition, every six months, each religious group must submit a written report of events to a special committee of the state. The state categorizes activities of house churches that refuse to register with the state and the practices of those religions conducting

the CCP's leadership and that each church register with the state. Religious activities must be reported to the Three-Self Movement's local committee. Religious leaders must also report all religious locations to the provincial Bureau of Religious Affairs. In addition, every six months, each religious group must submit a written report of events to a special committee of the state. Activities of house churches that refuse to register and the practices of those conducting activities outside the Three-Self Movement are listed as "illegitimate religious activities."[36] As China labels organized house churches that actively engage in evangelistic expansion as "cultic groups," they consequently become primary targets.[37]

The CCP's rule maintains the pattern of state supremacy and official orthodoxy. Any religion must adhere to legal ordinances and operate within CCP religious policies. As the state seeks to propagate its official orthodoxy, namely Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, it only endorses these.[38] It considers other ideologies and beliefs heterodox.[39] The attitude and understanding that China's contemporary ruling powers adopt towards religious freedom contribute to challenges to religious freedom, just as in the past under China's traditional state-religion regime. Nevertheless, national religious affairs leaders maintain that the requirement that any religion must adapt to CCP religious policies does not necessitate the changing of fundamental beliefs.[40] Since the 1990s, when President Jiang

their activities outside the Three-Self Movement as "illegitimate religious activities." The CCP uses the Three-Self Movement as a distinct state "tool" to control Chinese Christianity.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Numerous reports confirm religious persecution in the PRC, including material published by Amnesty International: Asia Watch Committee (U.S.), *Freedom of Religion in China* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 1992); Richard C. Bush Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); and Ho Kai-lin, *Laogaiying zhong de taianju erleu* [Children of God in the Labor Camp] (Taibei: Guangqi Press, 1990).

[38] After the Fifteenth National Congress of the CCP, the CCP added the Thought of Deng Xiaoping.

[39] Kindopp, "Fragmented Yet Defiant," 122–48.

[40] Elizabeth H. Prodromou, "Protecting Religious Freedom Abroad," *Harvard International Review*, July 1, 2011, http://hir.harvard.edu/protecting-religious-freedom-abroad/. "Legal Protection of the Freedom of Religious Belief," http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-2.html. In the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, freedom of religious belief is a basic right enjoyed by all citizens. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief." http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/Freedom/f-2.html, and "China: Religion and Chinese Law," Report for Department of Justice (June 2018)," *The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center*, https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1068681/download. "Religion should be adapted to the society in which it is prevalent. This is a universal law for the existence and development of religion. Now the Chinese people are building China into a modern socialist country with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese government advocates that religion should adapt to this reality" (para. 6).

Zemin launched his campaign to manage religions, one of the three basic strategies includes the goal to "make religion adaptable to socialism."[41] One could question, however, how religion can adapt to a philosophy that, at its core, holds that Marxism will lead to the eventual demise of all religions and asserts that "Marxism is incompatible with any theistic worldview."[42] The position of Xi Jinping, China's current president, further reveals that the ideology of the CCP is to align the hearts and minds of citizens to the CCP. In 2015, President Xi stated, "We must manage religious affairs in accordance with the law and adhere to the principle of independence to run religious groups on our own accord. … Active efforts should be made to incorporate religions into socialist society."[43] This attempt to more completely control religion mirrors one of the many CCP's concentrated, critical challenges to religious freedom in China.

In addition to the CCP's attempts to restructure and eliminate religion in China, the government utilizes criminal law to minimize religious influences in society and restrict religious freedom. For example, on July 1, 1979, the Fifth National People's Congress adopted the Criminal Law Regarding Religions. Article 99 of this ruling states: "Those organizing and utilizing feudal superstitious and secret societies to carry out counter-revolutionary activities will be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than five years."[44] In this statement the CCP's central committee conveyed the warning that religion must not interfere with education, marriage and family life, or politics.

Figure 4 depicts the state-religion relationship in contemporary China, which contributes to the continuing conflicts and challenges relating to religious freedom for all.

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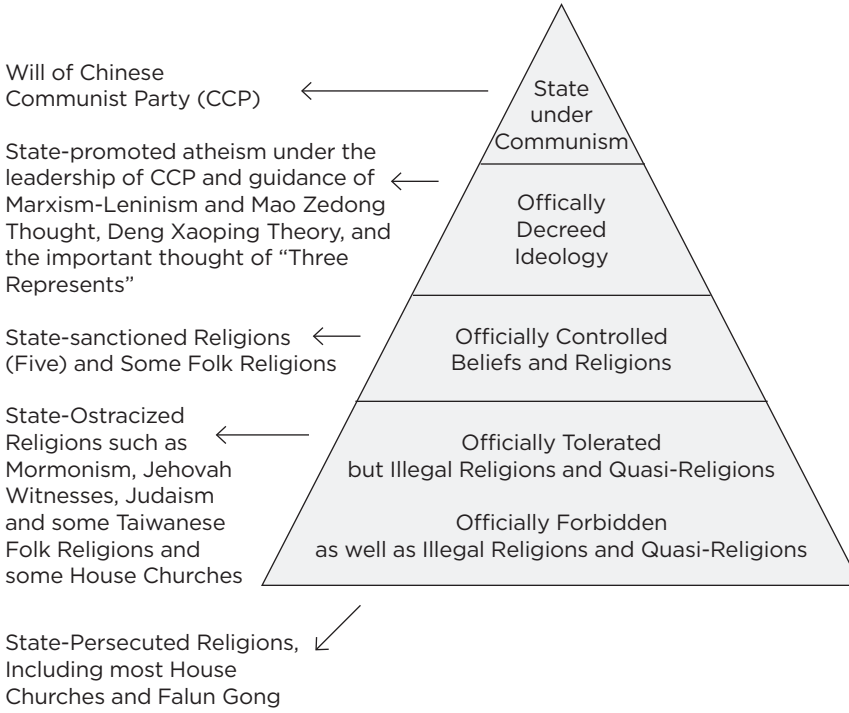
[41] The other two initiatives are: (1) wholly and correctly implementing a policy of religious freedom; (2) using legal means to strengthen administration of religious affairs. See Ye Xiaowen, "Shiji Zhijiao zhongjiao gongchuo de Sikao [Reflections on the Religious Work at the Change of Millennium]," *Zhongguo Zhongjiao* [*Religion in China*] 20.1 (2000): 4–9.

[42] Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49.

[43] "President Xi Jinping Warns Against Foreign Influence on Religions in China," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/21/president-xi-jinping-warns-against-foreign-influence-on-religions-in-china, paras. 3–4.

[44] Zinghao Zhou, "Religious Education in China," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education*, ed. Derek Davis and Elena Miroshnikova (New York: Routledge, 2013), 78. Document No. 19, issued on March 31, 1982, provides another illustration.

Figure 4. State-Religion Relationship in Contemporary Communist China



The Constitution of the People's Republic of China embraces the aim of focusing efforts on socialist modernization by adhering to Chinese-style socialism.[45] Ultimately, the state hopes to transition China into an affluent and dominant socialist country with a significant culture and democracy. Conversely, China's contemporary state-religion relationship, which aligns with CCP practices, proves counterproductive to the state's reported intentions. As the CCP imposes constraints on genuine religious believers, this approach will inevitably lead to further worldview clashes.

Considering the many blatant attempts to control religion, I wonder how the state's practices can be sustainable when different officials understand,

[45] Translated in *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, Article 5: "The state upholds the uniformity and dignity of the socialist legal system. No law or administrative or local rules and regulations shall contravene the Constitution. All state organs, the armed forces, all political parties and public organizations and all enterprises and undertakings must abide by the Constitution and the law. All acts in violation of the Constitution and the law must be investigated. No organization or individual may enjoy the privilege of being above the Constitution and the law."

interpret, and enforce the laws differently. Despite evidence that freedom, not repression, provides the way to produce more peaceful, prosperous, and stable societies, China's policies and practices ignore this concept.[46] Instead of the CCP strengthening its control of religion, I foresee the likelihood that the state will weaken as it continues to deny religious freedom for its citizens.

Communist conceptions of religion have ranged from "the opium of the people"[47] to "feudal superstition,"[48] to anti-progressive,[49] to being the obstacle to the party achieving its goal of radical reorganization. In Document No. 19,[50] under the heading "Religion as a Historical Phenomenon in the People's Republic of China,"[51] the CCP defines religion as follows:

> Religion is a historical phenomenon pertaining to a definite period in the development of human society. It has its own cycle of emergence, development, and demise. Religious faith and religious sentiment, along with religious ceremonies and organizations consonant with this faith and sentiment, are all products of the history of society. The earliest emergence of the religious mentality reflected the low level of production and the sense of awe toward natural phenomena of primitive peoples.[52]

CCP officials routinely respond to charges that condemn or challenge their religious policy and argue that the state protects religious freedom for Chinese citizens. Despite repeated claims, the CCP promotes atheism as China's dominant ideology and persecutes certain religions. Nevertheless, some of the CCP's public statements regarding freedom of religious belief appear promising, such as the following, recorded in Document No. 19:[53]

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[46] Leonard Leo and Don Argue, "The Huffington Post—Confronting China's Failure on Religious Freedom," in *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/op-eds/the-huffington-post-confronting-chinas-failure-religious-freedom, para. 8.

[47] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 42.

[48] Yoshiko Ashiwa, ed., *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 40.

[49] Klaus Larres, ed., *A Companion to Europe since 1945* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2014).

[50] The state still subscribes to Document No. 19's philosophy to manage religious affairs in China.

[51] Asia Watch Committee (U.S.), *Freedom of Religion in China*, 44.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Fenggang Yang, "A Research Agenda on Religious Freedom in China," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 11.2 (July 6, 2013): 6–17.

> What do we mean by freedom of religious belief? We mean that every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion and also the freedom not to believe in religion. S/he has also the freedom to believe in this religion or that religion. Within a particular religion, s/he has the freedom to believe in this sect [—] or that sect. A person who was previously a nonbeliever has the freedom to become a religious believer, and one who has been a religious believer has the freedom to become a nonbeliever.[54]

Even though the words in this document appear to align with international norms of the United Nations treaties, they do not clearly specify religious practice and organization.

Individuals and religious groups with grievances against the party remain voiceless and subject to prosecution and persecution. Even so, "the mutual religious stimulation that results from congregational worship, using the particular rites and practices of each religion"[55] nurtures empathetic feelings that unite people together. As religious followers meet regularly, they strengthen each other's faith and, in time, gain a stronger voice to support my conviction regarding the unsustainability in practice of the CCP's policy—it cannot physically control millions of religious adherents.

Representatives of global organizations working against the attempt to eradicate religion assert that state regulation cannot exterminate it.[56] I agree that the effectiveness of state power against religious freedom will ultimately fail as groups of believers challenge the CCP's religious policy, ultimately demonstrating its unsustainability in practice.

The old Chinese poem with the first line, "Let a hundred schools of thought contend"[57] marked the start of the Hundred Flowers Movement, a brief political campaign in which Mao Zedong deceived citizens with reassurances that they could freely speak, prompting them to verbalize their thoughts.[58] However, Mao betrayed the principle of equal voices in the

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[54] Ibid., 7.

[55] *Religion under Socialism in China*, trans. Zheng Xi'An, ed. Luo Zhufeng (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1991), 107.

[56] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*.

[57] Richard Kraus. "Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend," in *Words and Their Stories*, 249–262, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004188617/Bej.9789004188600.i-342_016.xml, doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188600.i-342.46.

[58] In developing the name for my theory, *baorong duoyuan*, which evolved during my PhD research, I considered a line from a Chinese poem. This line, "Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought [resonate]," reflects the ancient adage about the "contending of a hundred schools of philosophy" in the Warring States period (ca. 476–221 BC). Each word in this line carries a rich meaning. Hang-Li Zeng maintains that Chinese poetry encompasses "beauty in three aspects" and that in translating Chinese poetry into English, translators should attempt to retain the original beauty of the poem in meaning, sound, and form. Translating *baihua qifang*, the word *bai* translates to "one hundred," *hua* to "flower," and *fang* to "bloom." In this context, based on equality, one hundred flowers blossom simultaneously.

public realm.[59] Contrary to Mao, "All of the Hundred Schools arose in response to practical conditions [6th–3rd century BCE]. Their philosophers were either government officials or scholars, traveling from one feudal state to another and offering ideas for social reform."[60] The "one hundred flowers blossoming" diametrically opposes Mao's devious intent. *Baorong duoyuan* advocates for the principle of equal voices in the public square.

As China is an increasingly pluralistic society, with hundreds of worldviews and religions flourishing and competing, *baorong duoyuan* could prove to be the best option for protecting religious freedom for all in China. The concept of religious freedom not only refers to freedom for the numerous recognized religions, it also includes protection for atheists, secularists, agnostics, and even nonreligious people, as well as antireligious individuals and groups. The scope of freedom under *baorong duoyuan* applies to citizens both in their individual roles and in community with others,[61] not only to ensure the freedom of religious belief in private but to also extend that freedom to include the practice and manifestation of a person's belief publicly. The basic conditions necessary for *baorong duoyuan*, pluralism and democracy, are becoming more widespread, indicating that in the future, China may transition toward openness.

A democratic mainstream society with diverse cultures and groups is unlikely to show preference for one group over another. Han Zhu contends that as society develops, the presence of pluralism indicates that considerable progress has occurred and argues, "On the surface, a pluralistic society appears noisy and restless and without consensus. However, such a society will reach a final dynamic balance through its contradictions and in the end, a society full of different views and opinions."[62] Such a society is healthier and safer than an oligopolistic state like China, leaning only toward and recognizing one side—atheism. Contrary to reports about the rise of secular humanism and the demise of religion, two major religions, Islam and Christianity, are the fastest-growing contemporary worldviews.[63]

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[59] Gilbert King, "The Silence that Preceded China's Great Leap into Famine," *Smithsonian.com*, September 26, 2012, http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-silence-that-preceded-chinas-great-leap-into-famine-51898077/#yM3RgTSshzWACBQA.9.

[60] Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Chinese Philosophy," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2018), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-philosophy.

[61] Benjamin W. Redekop, *Enlightenment and Community: Lessing, Abbt, Herder, and the Quest for a German Public* (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), 223.

[62] Han Zhu, "China's Pluralistic Revolution," China.org.cn, May 26, 2013, trans. Li Jingrong, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2013-05/26/content_28924995.htm.

[63] Miroslav Volf, "A Voice of One's Own—Public Faith in a Pluralistic World," in *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*, ed. Thomas Banchoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 271–82.

If the CCP interferes with religious affairs, Chinese religion cannot become an independent force to influence society and politics. Currently, Communist Party members fill every important post in China. The Constitution stipulates that all Party members must be atheists. As religious believers do not qualify for central positions in the public square, religions in China are unable to influence politics at the policy-making level.

Jayoti Das and Cassandra DiRienzo emphasize that greater press freedom, which influences politics, contributes to a peaceful nation.[64] China's restrictions on freedom of the press and media counter this as they suppress religious freedom and its influence. The Chinese government strictly controls reporting, media and television, radio, and newspapers.[65] Chinese religious believers should be allowed to freely express their beliefs through public media, including television, radio, art, literature, film, journalism, and other public forums. I suggest that China's changing political and religious climate, which evolves from a morally bankrupt CCP ideology and a faith vacuum, could serve as a conduit for democracy to advance religious freedom for all in China.

Bijian Zheng, reportedly one of China's leading thinkers on ideological questions, recognizes that China needs help from the rest of the world, a world from which, in a sense, the state has alienated itself.[66] Zheng also acknowledges that the CCP needs to make some adjustments in its quest for "a peaceful rise." It is particularly pertinent that, despite Zheng's admission, the CCP, while appearing to be open to change, maintains a relationship with organized religion that remains volatile and conflictual.[67] The democratization of China, which could pave the way for religious freedom, may eventually happen, not merely because of factors that force the state to change but also, perhaps, because of the necessity to change.[68]

Yang connects democratization with religious freedom and argues that until Chinese elites better understand and appreciate the true concept of religious freedom, further change in China will not occur and may even prove impossible. He also asserts that the organized design of state-religion

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[64] Jayoti Das and Cassandra E. DiRienzo, "Conflict and the Freedom of the Press," *Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 4.1 (2014): 91–112.

[65] Chin-Chuan Lee, *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 100.

[66] Bijian Zheng, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian, 1997–2004*, Brookings, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/20050616bijianlunch.pdf.

[67] Eleanor Albert, "Christianity in China," *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 11, 2008, cfr.org/backgrounder/Christianity-china.

[68] Merle Goldman, "Is Democracy Possible?," in *China: Contemporary Political, Economic, and International Affairs*, ed. David Denoon (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 137–46.

relations, the comprehension of the religious freedom concept, and a civil society with a dynamic balance are vital to religious freedom.[69] Yang stresses that religious freedom arguably constitutes "the first freedom in a constitutional democracy, that is, it comes first before the other freedoms and may serve as the basis or wellspring for other freedoms."[70] When aligned with the philosophical intent of international agreements, the positive results that follow the implementation of religious freedom complement a country's economic development and social order.

In some countries, including China, where no constitutional tool such as "judicial review" exists, rights which the Constitution stipulates may not amount to much.[71] In addition, abuse of constitutions and misinterpretations of their meanings negates the power of the Constitution and citizens' rights.

Zhuo Xinping argues that two divergent purposes exist in legislation on religion in China. One purpose is the protection of religious freedom. Legislation on religion enacted for this reason expresses respect for religious belief and other faiths in human society. The other purpose includes the controlling of religion or, minimally religious organizations and activities.[72]

Table 1 compares essential elements of political liberalism, principled pluralism, and *baorong duoyuan*.

In a practical sense in a Chinese context, drawing from both political liberalism and principled pluralism, *baorong duoyuan* will do the following:

- hold elected officials accountable by citizens
- subscribe to a constitutional system that not only guarantees but protects the fundamental rights of citizens
- endeavor to advance a civil society so that citizens are "equal and free"
- promote government with a central structure that respects the sovereignty of other spheres, impartially protects religious freedom for all, and guarantees a mechanism that will execute fairness in matters of public justice
- advance the goal of citizens working together for the common good of all

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[69] Yang, "Research Agenda on Religious," 6–17.

[70] Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, 6.

[71] Abdurrahman Bapir, "Understanding Liberal Constitutionalism: Judicial Review, Protection of Rights and Constitutional Norms During Emergencies," 2014, https://www.academia.edu/9449606/Understanding_Liberal_Constitutionalism_Judicial_Review_Protection_of_Rights_and_Constitutional_Norms_During_Emergencies.

[72] Zhuo Xinping, "Religion and Rule of Law in China Today," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3.2 (2009): 519–27.

Table 1. Comparison of Political Liberalism, Principled Pluralism, and *Baorong Duoyuan*[73]

	Political Liberalism	**Principled Pluralism**	***Baorong Duoyuan***
Historical origin	Post-Reformation	Late nineteenth century	Early twenty-first century
Social context	Conflicts with irreconcilable yet reasonable worldviews	State demand for conformity and uniformity under pluralism	A projected democratic, Christianized, pluralistic post-communist China
Worldview orientation	Secular worldview	Judeo-Christian (theist) worldview	More inclusive, impartial, directional, pluralistic worldview
Constitutional perspective	Liberal constitutionalism favoring secular establishment	Liberal constitutionalism with a modest Christian establishment	Liberal constitutionalism with neither secular nor religious establishment
Protection of religious freedom	May protect religious freedom for all religions in private while exercising restraints on religious voices in public political discourses and even constraining certain religions	Tolerates freedom of all worldviews in private settings and in the public square, with minor favoritism toward Christianity	Protects freedom for all worldviews in private as well as in public settings; aligns with international norms for religious freedom
Interrelations of spheres	State-directed social order under a politically charged, uniform "overlapping consensus," with potential strife between contained and non-contained worldviews	Sphere autonomy under organic social unity with potential tension between Christian and non-Christian worldviews	State-facilitated, impartial, harmonious interrelations between different spheres with diverse worldviews
Role of religious education in public schools	May permit certain types of religious education to be taught	Allows religious education to be taught	Encourages religious education to be taught

[73] Original table developed from current research.

Designed for a liberal constitutional framework in a democratic, pluralistic state, as some predict China will be in the next two decades, *baorong duoyuan* emulates the message that the Golden Rule encourages—treat others the way one would want to be treated. Found in all cultures, religions, and worldviews, versions of the Golden Rule range from "those of ancient Egyptian religions to those of West Asia (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), South Asia (Hinduism and Buddhism) and East Asia (Confucianism). Nonreligious worldviews such as those of the Council for Secular Humanism and the British Humanist Association"[74] also sanction variations of this.

If the demise of communist rule occurs as predicted, and if as also projected, China transitions into a democratic, pluralistic state, citizens may finally realize their hope for religious freedom in their country. Then, *baorong duoyuan* will not only offer but prove to be the best option for the state in China, as well as for other countries open to its principles, to help ensure religious freedom for all.

[74] Johannes A. Van Der Ven, "Reflective Comparativism in Religious Research: A Cognitive Approach," in *Religion: Immediate Experience and The Mediacy of Research: Interdisciplinary Studies, Concepts and Methodology of Empirical Research in Religion*, ed. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Christopher P. Scholtz (Frankfort: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 105.

Theological Controversies in the Anti-Extradition Movement in Hong Kong

KIN YIP LOUIE

Abstract

From June to December of 2019, the normally peaceful streets of Hong Kong were filled with demonstrators and on many occasions with violent clashes between protesters and police. Hong Kong society was rocked by the Anti-Extradition Movement. We will give a brief description of the movement. Then we will describe the ways in which churches and Christians have participated in this movement. Thirdly, we will go into various controversies generated within the churches of Hong Kong. We do not intend to provide practical solutions to those controversies. Our main concern is to demonstrate that the social background of Christians often intertwines with theological convictions and these controversies which create a challenge to the unity of the local churches.

Keywords

Hong Kong, China, blue and yellow Christians, Anti-Extradition Movement, church and state, civil disobedience, protest, Christians and violence, police

I. *The Anti-Extradition Amendment*

When Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, the foundation of the legal and political system was laid down in the *Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*, simply referred to as the *Basic Law*. It promises Hong Kong will have a democratically elected Chief Executive and Legislative. However, the *Basic Law* is vague about when and how these democratic elections should be held. When in 2014 the Hong Kong government finally proposed the procedure for Chief Executive to be democratically elected in 2017, most people regarded the procedure as not truly democratic. All candidates for the Chief Executive were to be vetted by an Election Committee. The political opposition to the government led to the "Occupy Central with Love and Peace" movement (usually shortened as the Occupy Central).[1]

Occupy Central was a mass movement of civil disobedience. Tens of thousands of citizens occupied the streets of the Central District (this is the central business district), intending to paralyze business activities and force the government to choose between submitting to the will of the people or using violence to disperse the crowds. Ideally, under moral conviction and international pressure, the government would submit to the will of the people. However, in reality, after initial attempts to disperse the crowd with tear gas, the government decided to simply wait until the movement lost momentum. After the Central had been occupied for 79 days, the streets were cleared out after a court injunction. The election plan proposed by the government was rejected in the Legislative Council, and the government has not proposed any alternative since.

In many ways, the Anti-Extradition Movement 2019 is a continuation of the Occupy Central (or Umbrella Movement) of 2014. In brief, the controversy began with a Hong Kong resident, Chan Tong-kai, killing his girlfriend in Taiwan in February 2018. Chan returned to Hong Kong and was later arrested for a minor offense. Since the murder took place in Taiwan, the Hong Kong government had no jurisdiction to handle the murder case. Since Taiwan and Hong Kong do not have an extradition agreement, there exists no legal mechanism for Hong Kong to surrender a wanted criminal

[1] The Occupy Central Movement is often called the Umbrella Movement. Technically, Occupy Central refers to the original plan of Benny Tai, and the Umbrella Movement refers to the wider social movement generated by the debate about election reform, which went far beyond the scope of Occupy Central. However, since our concern is Christian involvement in social movements, we shall concentrate on Occupy Central.

to the Taiwan authorities. Of course, Taiwan police cannot come to Hong Kong to arrest Chan either.

In order to solve the legal conundrum, the Hong Kong government proposed the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matter Legislation (Amendment) Bill in February 2019 (hereafter called the Amendment). The Amendment allows the Hong Kong Chief Executive to initiate the extradition of citizens to face trials of crimes supposedly committed in other countries, even when Hong Kong does not have an extradition agreement with that country. Under the Amendment, the Government could legally send Chan to face the murder charge in Taiwan. It could also legally send citizens to mainland China (with which Hong Kong does not have an extradition agreement) to face court in the mainland for crimes supposedly committed there.

Despite certain provisions, there is much concern regarding the possible misuse of the Amendment. Many Hong Kong citizens fear that once the Amendment is passed, Beijing might use this law for the purpose of political persecution. Even though the Amendment supposedly will have explicit clauses to protect fundamental human rights, some people worry that the Chinese government would trump up fake charges to satisfy the requirements of the Amendment. Others worry that, even if there were a *prima facie* case for the accusation, the defendant could not have a fair trial in the mainland (as the Chinese government practically always wins in the mainland courts). When the Hong Kong government tried to push the highly unpopular Amendment through the Legislative Council, it triggered a massive protest movement.

When the Legislative Council was going to deliberate on the Amendment, a group of Christian ministers held a prayer meeting outside the Legislative Council building in the early morning of June 12, 2019.[2] Many Hong Kong people spontaneously gathered around the building that morning, blocking all entrances. The prayer service turned out to be the only organized meeting outside of the Legislative Council, and it caught the attention of the crowd. Later in the morning, the crowd continued to block Council members from entering the building. When the police gathered inside the building and seemed prepared to rush outside and disperse the crowd, the

[2] Two groups were the main organizers of this prayer meeting, and they organized many other events throughout the movement. One group is called the Hong Kong Pastors Joint Declaration Committee. The other is called Concerned Pastors. Both of them are networks of individuals with no paid staff. The first group was formed in May 2019. The latter was formed in 2014 during the Occupy Central Movement. Many individuals are members of both groups. I am a member of Concerned Pastors.

pastors who had stayed behind began to form a wall between the crowd and the police. To calm things down they began to sing the chorus "Sing Alleluia to the Lord!" They successfully brought a temporary truce. However, in the afternoon, riot police used tear gas indiscriminately to try to disperse the crowd surrounding the Council. It seemed, at least to many demonstrators, that the police were more interested in terrifying people than in dispersing the crowd.[3] The crowd ran away but returned.

For the next week or so, crowds gathered around the government headquarters, with police guarding the entrances to the buildings. During this beginning phase, one could often hear demonstrators (both Christian and non-Christian) singing the chorus to the police guarding the government headquarters, even for hours continuously. No one could have predicted that an explicitly Christian song would become a rallying song for a political demonstration. In this case (as is often the case), actions precede theological reflection, and events force the church to reflect: are the church and her pastors theologically justified in playing such a prominent role in a political movement?

The government did finally withdraw the Amendment. However, as the movement developed, the focus shifted to the force used by both police and demonstrators. In short, it is a sad story of escalating violence. The police gradually got more proactive in trying to disperse the crowd before it grew too big. In response, the protestors also got more aggressive. Tear gas was often used by police, and the protesters responded with homemade gas masks. They built roadblocks and hurled rocks at the police. Later on, police employed water cannons and even live ammunition.

The violence reached its peak on November 17, 2019, when demonstrators occupied the Polytechnic University and the entrance to the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (a major artery). Police tried to storm the campus, using lots of tear gas, water cannons, and armored vehicles. Protesters fought back with many petrol bombs and arrows. Hong Kong has never seen such a violent confrontation before and hopefully will never see one again. The Polytechnic incident convinced most protestors that direct confrontation with police is unproductive and dangerous. A landslide victory for the democratic camp in District Councils elections in November gave the demonstrators an

[3] The strategy of the Hong Kong police during the whole Anti-Extradition Movement is another topic that deserves careful examination by experts in this area. It seems, to this author at least, that the police were intent on avoiding a repeat of the Occupy Central Movement. They were much more proactive this time, but that actually made violent clashes unavoidable.

important symbolic victory. With the onset of COVID-19, mass demonstrations came to an abrupt stop.

II. *Christian Involvement*

We shall list the main ways that Christians and churches have engaged in this social movement.

1. *Propaganda and Advocacy*

Even before June 12, 2019, as the controversy over the Amendment heated up, some denominations decided to issue public statements asking the government to stop pushing the Amendment. For example, the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong issued such a statement on June 7.[4] Why did the Baptist Convention, traditionally apolitical, enter into the Amendment debate? The statement cites the example of Ezekiel. God told Ezekiel that he was the watchman of Israel (Ezek 33:1–9). If Ezekiel remained silent while the Israelites indulged in sin, then the watchman shared the guilt of the Israelites. By implication, the Convention regarded themselves as watchmen over Hong Kong society. Why did the Convention regard the Amendment as a kind of evil? First, it led to fear in society and mayhem in the Legislative Council. Second, the fear was based on legitimate concerns about whether the Amendment provides sufficient protection of human rights and the integrity of the rule of law in Hong Kong. Based on these considerations, the Baptists asked the government to withdraw the Amendment and restart the consultation.

After June 12, many churches and Christian organizations, or even groups of Christians (usually with names like "A group of [a particular denomination Christians]"), published statements criticizing the government. Most of these express support for the so-called Five Demands: withdrawal of the Amendment; retraction of calling (by the government) the protests "riots"; unconditional release of all demonstrators; setup of an independent commission to investigate political violence; and genuinely democratic elections. Many Christians wrote political comments or passed on news and others' comments in social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

[4] Original Chinese text on http://www.hkbaptist.org.hk/acms/content.asp?site=bchk&op=showbyid&id=75451. It should be noted that this statement generated a lot of controversy within the Baptist Convention. Some leaders believed that there was not sufficient consultation before the chair of the Convention put the statement to a vote. The vote among the leaders produced a small majority for putting out the statement.

These Christians in the democratic or antigovernment camp became known as *yellow Christians*.

Of course, the *blue Christians* in the progovernment camp on the other side of the political spectrum also engaged in political advocacy. Some of their messages focus on the violence of the demonstrators (particularly from August 2019 onwards); other messages are prayers that implicitly encourage people to support the government; still others are messages advocating conspiracy theories (mainly that the demonstrations are an American scheme to disturb the social stability of China).

2. *Participation in Demonstrations*

During the protests, many Christians participated in Christian services (both indoor and outdoor) around the demonstration areas.[5] Most, if not all, of these Christians also took part in the demonstrations. Besides ordinary Christians, some pastors demonstrated and dressed in ways that identified them as pastors. During the early stage (in June and July 2019), the pastors would occasionally try to mediate between demonstrators and police. For example, they would ask the police to leave a way for demonstrators to disperse, or they would ask demonstrators to stop throwing bricks at the police. Sometimes they talked to demonstrators and encouraged them to be cautious and to protect themselves. As the demonstrations became more violent later on, the pastors concentrated their ministry on caring for the wounded, both physically and psychologically. From a relatively safe location, they would look for anyone who needed comfort or help them to move to a safe place. They would also spread information through social media on where demonstrators were waiting for cars to pick them up.[6]

3. *Organizing Prayer or Worship Services or Marches*

Some Christians organized smaller marches or sit-ins with explicit Christian symbols (e.g., the cross). While the secular marches were often understood to be an expression of the people's power, the Christian marches often featured the tone of lament. Christians considered their marches as a plea for divine intervention and as a witness to the government's injustice.

[5] However, none of these prayer meetings openly advocated a strategy of violence in the demonstrations.

[6] Starting around August 2019, the government began to stop all public transportation to and from the area of the demonstrations. The stated goal was to stop people flooding to the demonstration and to protect passengers. The yellow camp claims that this was the government's way of hindering the demonstrators from leaving, thus rounding up more protestors and letting the police impose terror.

Instead of shouting slogans such as "Five demands, not one less," they often marched in silence.

Various churches and Christian organizations held prayer services or workshops addressing social unrest. The political tone of these meetings was pro-government or prodemocracy, depending on the organizers. The yellow Christians were especially active in organizing interchurch services. Many churches also invited outside speakers to speak on social justice and related issues.

4. *Petition*

As a particular kind of advocacy, petitions provided traceable records for participants to register their opinions. Compared with a march, the time commitment of a petition is minimal. However, since most petitions require a traceable email address, it made the signer identifiable by others, including the Beijing government. In the struggle between an open society and state-controlled public discourse (supposedly Beijing's desire), petitions became a remarkable symbol of protest, a channel for building solidarity and self-identification. With its low entry barrier (anyone can put out a Google Form), many Christian groups (usually not local churches) issued petitions throughout the period. The yellow camp put out the most petitions.

5. *Church as Shelter*

During the Occupy Central Movement in 2014, a few churches opened their doors so that demonstrators, particularly those who slept on the street, could access their toilets, have shelter during heavy rain, or have drinking water. Given this precedent, some churches promptly opened their doors to the public during the Anti-Extradition Movement. As the movement later evolved into simultaneous small demonstrations in various areas (instead of one big demonstration in the central business district) and public transportation during demonstrations began to get more difficult, so churches in different areas faced this question: should we open our doors to the demonstrators? Scores of churches did open their doors, though still a small fraction of the more than a thousand churches in Hong Kong. Then, on November 11, 2019, the police entered a Catholic church to arrest people without the permission of the church staff. Afterward, churches stopped opening to the public for fear of legal ramifications.

6. *Pastoral Work*

Many Christians experienced psychological and material difficulties during the social unrest. Some pastors opened their homes to young people who

had temporarily run away from home because they had irreconcilable political differences with their parents. Many pastors preached Sunday sermons on trusting in the Lord in times of difficulty. They counseled individual Christians who were deeply disturbed by social unrest. Some churches hosted healing sessions, where counselors led Christians to reflect on their experience in the social movement. Often, someone would break down in tears as they reflected on the violent scenes. Churches also conducted seminars on healing relationships, particularly across different generations. Christian fellowships and even family relationships were often broken due to political differences. Broken relationships are inevitable collateral damage of any divisive social movement, and mending relationships was an urgent pastoral task during the movement.

III. *Theological Controversies*

Fervent theological controversies were raging in the church throughout the movement. Rather than trying to settle them, we will attempt to give an objective picture of both sides.

1. *The Separation of Church and State*

Both blue and yellow camps claimed that there should be a "separation of church and state," though they interpreted the phrase differently. Below are the major interpretations.

a. Church Involvement in Political Issues

Some (usually blue Christians) claim that the church is a place where one talks about spiritual matters and builds up Christian fellowship. Since politics is not spiritual and creates strife among Christians, the church should avoid touching any political topic. Sermons should not mention politics, and the church should not hold seminars or discussion groups focusing on political topics. Silence is golden here, as the only way to preserve the unity of the church.

The yellow camp responds by questioning the separation of spiritual and secular matters. Taking an extreme example, is the Holocaust merely a political topic? Or any atrocities committed by a secular government? Are the controversies around same-sex marriage political or spiritual matters? Since evangelical churches have not remained silent in the issue of same-sex marriage, why is there a gag order when it comes to democracy? If the government acts in contradiction to biblical ethical principles, the church should voice her protest. There should not be a separation of discourse into

one about faith and one about politics; the Bible is full of political discourse, for example, the Exodus story, the Old Testament prophets denouncing corrupt kings, and Jesus challenging the Pharisees' authority.

As for harmony, does gagging political discourse lead to genuine peace among Christians? Yellow Christians claim that the prohibition of political discourse is a performative contradiction, as the suppression of political discourse within the church is itself a political action. In other words, when church leaders insist that there should be a separation of political from religious discourse, their authoritarian proclamation is already a political discourse. Instead of peace, the gagging approach leads to anger in the dissenting party.

One way we can interpret this conflict is to contrast modern culture with postmodern culture. Blue Christians often implicitly assume a modernist conception of society, where distinctive institutions exist for different functions.[7] A religious institution should therefore should confine itself to religious activities. Political actions, including discussion about politics, should be avoided. The yellow camp takes a postmodernist conception of society, where different groups engage in antagonistic games. They see political struggles in every sphere of life, including within the church. Yellow Christians see Jesus's denunciations of the Pharisees as political discourses challenging the authority of the Jewish leaders, while blue Christians usually ignore their political dimension. There cannot be separation of religious discourse and political discourse because all religious discourse is inherently political discourse, and all political discourse makes claims about orthopraxis in society.

Many of the younger generation expected pastors to give guidance on how to respond to the movement from a Christian perspective.[8] However, most of them do not expect them to endorse a definite political position. Other Christians find it offensive when pastors even mention the Amendment in their sermons. They would challenge the pastors openly if they heard political messages in a sermon. We need a pastoral theology for a politically explosive situation.

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[7] Such dichotomous thinking is based on a division between the spiritual and secular realm. This division can be traced theologically to early twentieth century American fundamentalism.

[8] The Ray Bakke Centre for Urban Transformation in Hong Kong has conducted a survey of several thousand Christians and indicates that Christians have a strong yearning for pastoral teaching on the movement. However, since the survey was done through snowballing and the Internet, it is likely to be skewed towards the younger and more educated population. See the press release on its website: http://rbc.bethelhk.org/index.php?lang=en.

b. A Pragmatic Approach

According to the blue camp, the church should leave the state alone so that the state leaves the church alone. Following Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:1–2, we should bless the government (even when it is morally corrupt), in the hope that Christians can live peacefully and evangelize in freedom.[9] If someone invokes the name of the church or Christian faith in political resistance, the government may legitimately regard the church as a political opponent (or an unpatriotic organization). The church will then suffer in evangelistic work. Anyway, the church in Hong Kong carries little weight in the political arena. If we cannot do much to address injustice in society, why not let the church concentrate on her evangelical task?

This pragmatic concern is particularly important for Christian organizations or denominations that have significant ministries in mainland China. The Beijing government has a well-known tendency to kick out any non-governmental organization (NGO) that is critical of the Communist Party. Even indirect support, such as opening the church to the public during demonstrations, is noted by the mainland government. For example, *Tai Kun Pao*, a newspaper representing Beijing's interests, named specific churches that gave shelter to the so-called rioters. For the sake of the good work that Christians are doing in China, should not Christians remain silent?

The yellow camp answers by asserting the importance of being faithful to the gospel, particularly in facing oppressive political powers. If the church loses its courage to speak the truth, has she not become just another do-good organization? If political reality dictates the message of the church, then the church has forgotten that the crucified Lord is her head. Moreover, compromising the truth will cause the younger generation to leave the church in droves. Would not this be a terrible price to pay for keeping some optional ministries in the mainland?

This debate hinges on a judgment as to how evil the Hong Kong and Beijing governments are. Even blue Christians acknowledge that the church should not, for example, obey Hitler by sending Jews to concentration camps. The yellow camp often raises the slogan of *the banality of evil*,[10] comparing silence during the Anti-Extradition Movement to silence during the Nazi regime. However, is the Communist Party comparable to the Nazis? The complexity of evaluating the moral status of a political regime makes unanimity among Christians an impossible goal.

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[9] Unfortunately, we cannot explore how this viewpoint is related to Luther's two-kingdom theology.

[10] Referring to the famous phrase of Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

c. Unconditional Submission to the Secular Government

In Romans 13:1–7, it seems that Paul advocates unconditional submission, as he asserts that all governments (even evil ones) are ordained by God. Blue Christians also point to Jesus, who "was led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa 53:7 NIV). Another example is David, who refused to kill King Saul even when Saul unjustly persecuted him. An eschatology that emphasizes the irredeemable corruption of the existing world may also encourage passivity in social movements. Unconditional obedience is also a form of separation in the sense of excluding political discourse from church life. Many blue Christians may actually dislike the Hong Kong government but think that citizens should be submissive anyway.

The yellow camp would emphasize the contextual limit of the passage: Paul's concern is that Christian should obey Rome, even if it is pagan. In addition, Paul mandates that the government punish wrongdoers, not political opponents. They point to the Old Testament prophets, who announced divine judgment on the unrighteous kings of Israel and the nations. Jesus did not hesitate to denounce publicly the sins of the Pharisees. Moreover, the book of Revelation shows the need to resist evil governments.

It is clear that in general the Old Testament and the New Testament have different contexts and focuses. The New Testament assumes that the church is a small minority and seldom talks about Christians transforming wider society. The Old Testament takes for granted that the laws of God should judge the legitimacy of a ruler. What is the more appropriate model for the church today?

d. A Separation of Financial Interests

The yellow camp claims that denominations that have received significant financial assistance from the government for their social services, or those that have significant financial and land assets, often take a progovernment position to protect their income. On the other hand, blue Christians sometimes accuse the yellow camp of accepting foreign financial help. Some even claim that the Anti-Extradition Movement was an American or Western product designed to unsettle China. In our postmodern culture, the hermeneutics of suspicion is widespread. The separation of church and state becomes a convenient banner for accusing opponents of having ulterior motives.

e. The Separation of the Clergy from Political Activities

Some blue Christians claim that a pastoral calling means separation from all secular calling, including political activity. Just as journalists should

refrain from political advocacy to maintain objectivity, so pastors should be apolitical so they can pastor people of any political position and avoid antagonizing them.

Yellow Christians respond by saying that political positions often reflect core moral values. A pastor's silence in political issues can be seen as indifference to fundamental moral issues. Should not pastors give moral guidance on burning contemporary issues? Otherwise, preaching will be irrelevant to reality. Moreover, should not a pastor model political discernment in our complex world? If the pastor is sincere and humble, they may serve as a model to facilitate dialogue between opposite political camps. The gagging of political issues would mean that the congregation might never learn to speak the truth in love on political issues.

The Anti-Extradition Movement brought into focus the difficulty of pastoring in today's fragmented society. Can pastors be principled but also objective and understanding in addressing social and political issues? Alternatively, should blue Christians and yellow Christians form different congregations led by pastors with the corresponding political positions? Or should there be a physical congregation as well as a virtual congregation, the latter specializing in pastoring Christians' political spirituality? These are all solutions being practiced in Hong Kong right now.

f. Separation between National and Christian Identity

The debates here are more implicit than explicit, and they are loaded with emotion. If people identify the nation (with its ethnocultural identity) as equivalent to the existing government, and if the church encourages people to love their own nation, is the church getting too political? When blue Christians claim that Christians should not publicly voice criticism of the government, should they also refrain from praising the achievements of modern China and going to public rallies celebrating the national state? Some blue Christians note that Jews were proud of their country in the Old Testament, so we should cherish our nation. They feel that criticism of the Beijing government would bring shame on China. People should support their own nation and not idolize the values of the post-Christian West.

Yellow Christians are usually more ambivalent about patriotism. On the one hand, they tend to emphasize the inherent ecumenism of the Christian faith. Christ must claim our deepest loyalty. If we put patriotism before truth and justice, we are in danger of worshiping the state (portrayed as a beast in Revelation). Separation of church and state means that Christians should act as a witness against such idolization in the public square. However, yellow Christians also emphasize the importance of local community.

They believe neighborly love means cherishing local relationships and identities. They foster local culture and local interests, contrasted with national interest. Some blue Christians regard this mentality as encouraging local resistance to the Beijing government, thus a form of political meddling. The line between healthy and idolized patriotism is far from clear.

We conclude by noting that the Bible does not explicitly teach the separation of church and state. Israel in the Old Testament was a theocratic state, and the New Testament simply assumes that the tiny apostolic church has no political power in the Roman empire. Since the Enlightenment, the Western world has developed an ideology of separation in the process of secularization. We now understand that there is such a thing as a naked public square.[11] In the majority world, many Christians face the pressure of the domestication of religion for political purposes. What is our theology for Christian involvement in the public square? What is a Christian theology of the national state? These are pressing issues in our times.

2. *Christians and Violence*

Violence is the second major area of theological debate. As the Anti-Extradition Movement turned more and more violent after August, the debate about Christian involvement heated up in the church. Is not Christ the Prince of Peace? What role can Christians have in a violent social movement?

Postmodern philosophers such as Michel Foucault have taught us that violence comes in many forms. Stabbing a person with a knife is certainly a form of violence, but so is abusive language, and so is an abusive asymmetric power relationship (as the #MeToo Movement and BLM emphasize). Taking this broadly, it is not clear that the Christian faith rejects violence in a blanket way. Did not Jesus denounce the Pharisees with abusive language (cf. Matt 23:1–36)? Or, is not Jesus's cleansing of the temple (John 2:13–17), using strips of leather, another example of violence? The Old Testament sometimes seems to glorify violence. Obvious examples include the ten plagues, the conquest of Canaan (particularly the *herem*), and the imprecatory psalms. Does the Bible condone violence, particularly when people fight against tyrants?

Can the increasing violence of the police be justified? According to Romans 13:3–4, God grants secular governments the sword to punish the wicked. Blue Christians claim that the Hong Kong police were doing their

[11] Richard J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

God-ordained job. But did the police use excessive violence? Blue Christians often circulate on social media clips about the violence of the protestors. Supposedly, police violence was necessary to deal with a small bunch of hooligans who threatened the safety of policemen. Blue Christians claim, and perhaps truly believe, that the police did not intentionally inflict harm on peaceful demonstrators, except for a few rogue police. The yellow Christians, on the other hand, believe that the police did use excessive force most of the time. They claim that the force against the protestors was vindicatory rather than self-defensive. The tactics of the police were aimed at terrorizing protestors rather than dispersing the crowd. For yellow Christians, the police were acting criminally. Evaluating the nature of police violence during the movement is an important step towards reconciliation. However, this issue is not a theological question. If the blue Christians' view that the police acted only against violence is correct, even yellow Christians have to agree that police violence can be justified.

Can the increasing violence of the protestors be justified? This question is indeed a theological conundrum. There was a spectrum of violent acts: shouting abusive language at police, using umbrellas as cover to charge at police, throwing rocks at police, vandalism in subway stations, destroying traffic lights, blocking major traffic arteries, throwing petrol bombs. Each form of violence can be debated.

Let us consider abusive language first. Jesus teaches us that words coming out of a person's mouth can defile them. Presumably, foul language makes a person foul. Yet Jesus himself used seemingly abusive language against the Pharisees. For Martin Luther, invective is a tool to defeat the devil. Yet few Christians today would argue that abusive language is necessary to defeating evil. Rather, yellow Christians usually adopt a postmodern perspective on language, arguing that the line between foul and normal language is a socially constructed reality. By adopting the socially censored language, the protestors carry their protest against the status quo into the realm of language. While impotent to literally dethrone the established political power, abusive language is a symbolic dethroning of power. This is a form of verbal terrorism to counter police terrorism. As Jesus was harsh against the religious and political terror of the Pharisees, so yellow Christians believe that they are following Jesus in using harsh language against political tyranny. We will leave it to biblical scholars to decide the true implications of Jesus's denunciation of the Pharisees.

Then there is nonbodily violence. Setting up roadblocks or smashing ticketing machines in subway stations are acts of defiance, but they do not harm other people. If destruction of nonliving objects could actually

promote social justice, few Christians would argue that those objects have inviolable rights. The real issue here is civil disobedience: can we rip apart regular social life and break the law in order to build a better society? Blue Christians claim that there is no Christian justification for such vandalism in civil society. While the Bible explicitly says that we should submit to the government, it never commands us to promote democracy. Civil disobedience is permissible only when the government forces us to go against the explicit commands of the Bible, such as forbidding evangelism. Moreover, disruption of social order brings hardship to many people (e.g., damaging subway facilities causes hardship to many who depend on the subway to go to work). The Bible teaches us to love our neighbors, and disrupting their lives is unloving.

The yellow camp justified acts of vandalism by appealing to the foundation of social order and the law. They would agree that vandalism per se is immoral, but an oppressive political order is an even greater evil. The meaning of Romans 13:1–7 is that the secular government should promote justice. If the laws are unjust, they cease to be lawful in God's eyes. Civil disobedience is justifiable if it arouses people's anger towards unjust government and laws. When protestors destroy public facilities, they are fighting for a just society, a state of affairs that is beneficial to all. From this perspective, vandalism is an act of sacrificial love, in that some protestors risk their personal safety and career (if they are indicted) to strive for a common good on behalf of all.

However, are the police really so evil as to have lost their legitimacy to defend public order in Hong Kong? Are acts of vandalism useful in uniting people in their will to fight social justice? How do we judge whether the action of a minority truly represents the will of the majority? These theoretical and practical questions are left unanswered.

Finally, bodily violence. Many protestors did not deliberately try to hurt the police, but nobody will deny that petrol bombs can cause serious harm. The Christian rationale against such violence is clear: human life bears the image of God and should not be trampled upon. No Christian leader would explicitly encourage bodily violence. For the yellow Christians, the main question is whether we can silently condone it. Their justification is similar to the just war tradition. Basically, violence is an action of last resort against oppressive power. Against police brutality, the violence of protestors is self-defense. In fact, some Christian leaders described the movement as a civil war. The war imagery may sometimes help to arouse sympathy among the public for protestors, but whether such military rhetoric is helpful for the movement is debatable.

Conclusion

The conflict in Hong Kong is not an idiosyncratic event. There was a time when people believed in a set of universal values (liberty, equality, human rights, etc.) and a set of universal processes (e.g., the multiparty system and one-person-one-vote elections) to resolve differences in the society. Past Western theologians were eager to advocate these universal values as representative of Christian values. During the financial tsunami of 2008, the ideal of liberal democracy was called into question, and the Chinese model (authoritarian politics with a market economy) became more attractive. The Enlightenment project is losing its credibility. In the West, there are more polarized elections and contentious legal decisions. In the developing world, there is a rebellion against Western individualism and a tendency to glorify the power of the state.

How should the church respond in this increasingly divided world? Should the church join the power struggle in the name of achieving some Christian ideals? Or should churches try to rise above the divisiveness? And how can churches maintain their unity? What does unity really mean? All these issues deserve careful theological reflection, and hopefully our contribution helps deepen conversations on these issues.

Blasphemy, Politics, and Religion: The Case of Indonesia and Ahok

PAUL MARSHALL

Abstract

Thirty years ago, few in the West were much concerned about blasphemy restrictions which, while sometimes still on the statute books, were usually thought domestically and internationally to be only of historical interest. But, by the end of the twentieth, there were repeated eruptions of violence worldwide in reaction to blasphemy accusations, nearly all in the Muslim-majority world. Even comparatively moderate Indonesia has seen an increase in such accusations. This culminated in 2017 when Ahok, the incumbent governor of Jakarta and a Calvinist, was sentenced to two years imprisonment on trumped-up charges of blasphemy. His case and others show the degree to which blasphemy accusations have become political weapons.

Keywords

Ahok, blasphemy, Indonesia, Jokowi, insulting religion, politics

I. *The Resurgence of Blasphemy Accusations*

Around thirty years ago few in the West were much concerned about blasphemy restrictions which, while sometimes still on the statute books, were usually thought domestically and also abroad, to be only of historical interest.[1] That began to change when in 1989 the late Ayatollah Khomeini, then head of Iran's government, declared that it was the duty of every Muslim to kill Indian-born British-based writer Salman Rushdie on the grounds that his novel *The Satanic Verses* was blasphemous. Khomeini's edict triggered a wave of violence. Rushdie himself survived, but only at the cost of a hidden and protected life. Others connected with the book were not so fortunate. The novel's Japanese translator was assassinated, its Italian translator was stabbed, its Norwegian publisher was shot, thirty-five guests at a Turkish hotel hosting its Turkish publisher were burned to death in an arson attack. Khomeini's fatwa also inaugurated a worldwide movement to export blasphemy rules already suppressing religious minorities and Muslim dissenters in Muslim majority countries.

Subsequently, the early twenty-first century has seen repeated eruptions of violence worldwide in reaction to events such as Theo van Gogh's and Ayaan Hirsi Ali's feminist film *Submission*, the Danish and Swedish cartoons ostensibly of Islam's prophet Mohammed, Pope Benedict's Regensburg speech on reason and violence in religion, Geert Wilders's deliberately provocative film *Fitna*, and the cartoons in *Charlie Hebdo*, which led to the murder of most of its editorial staff. Now such matters are frequently in the news. Some events, such as the declaration by Terry Jones, a deservedly obscure Florida pastor with a congregation of less than fifty, that he would burn a Qur'an during prime time on September 11, 2010, achieved a perfect media storm. It combined Muslim outrage at desecration of the Qur'an with American self-promotion and publicity seeking, together with the voracious demands of 24-hour news coverage. The result dominated several news cycles and managed to draw in the American president, as well as senior United States military leaders and cabinet officials. And dozens of people were killed.

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[1] The following two sections draw on Paul Marshall and Nina Shea, *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

II. *Manipulation by Governments*

The international attention to these events has led to an impression that campaigns against "insulting Islam" and kindred offenses are mainly a matter of callous cartoonists and provocative pastors. Such impressions are misleading and provide only a small hint of the full, terrifying implications of such accusations. In fact, contemporary violence in response to purported religious insults is not simply the spontaneous expression of outraged religious sentiments but is often carefully stoked and channeled by politicians and governments, usually authoritarian ones straining for political advantage. And the objects and victims of such accusations are not usually insensitive Westerners but religious minorities and Muslim dissidents.

Accusations of blasphemy or insulting Islam are currently used systematically in much of the Muslim world to silence religious minorities, authors, and courageous journalists and democracy activists, including the region's Nobel Prize winners. Muslim reformers who question repressive interpretations of Islam may be jailed for "insulting Islam" or "mocking religion," or threatened, even killed, by mobs, vigilantes, and terrorists, simply for advocating an Islam of freedom.

The famous "Danish cartoons" of Mohammed were published in Denmark's largest newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September 2005. Subsequently, some were reproduced in several Muslim countries by newspapers that printed them in order to criticize them. There was no violent response. It was only after the December 2005 summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now named the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) in Saudi Arabia, which was initially convened to discuss sectarian violence and terrorism but instead focused on the cartoons and urged its member states to rouse opposition to Denmark, that violence erupted. In February 2006, that is *five months* after the caricatures were published, many Muslims across Africa, Asia, and the Mideast set out from Friday prayers for often violent demonstrations, killing over 200 people, mostly Christians in Nigeria.

Similar manipulation of news and feelings occurred with other international blasphemy incidents. Campaigns against "insults to Islam" are not simply eruptions of outraged religious feeling; they also reflect political manipulation of these feelings. This does not mean that the outrage felt by ordinary Muslims when their beliefs and symbols are criticized, mocked, or besmirched is not real—after all, governments cannot manipulate religious feelings unless there are religious feelings there to manipulate—but it does mean that responses to purported insult are usually politically channeled.

Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are more repressive on matters of purported blasphemy, but it is troubling that comparatively moderate Indonesia has seen an increase in such accusations. These culminated in 2017 when Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, generally known as Ahok, the incumbent governor of Jakarta, the capital, was sentenced to two years imprisonment on trumped-up charges of blasphemy.

III. *Blasphemy in Indonesia*

Indonesia's 1945 Constitution guarantees religious freedom, but on January 27, 1965, then-President Sukarno issued a presidential decree on religious abuse or defamation.[2] In 1966, this provision was incorporated as Article 156 (a) of the Indonesian Criminal Code in section V of crimes against public order.[3]

Article 1 of this law prohibits individuals from deviation (*penyimpangan*) from an officially recognized religion, and Article 4 prohibits defamation (*penodaan*) of these religions.[4] Most blasphemy cases have been brought under Article 4, which stipulates

> a maximum imprisonment of five years … for whosoever in public deliberately expresses their feelings or engages in actions that: a. in principle is hostile and considered as abuse or defamation of a religion embraced in Indonesia; b. has the intention that a person should not practice any religion at all that is based on belief in Almighty God.[5]

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[2] Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965.

[3] The original Indonesian version is "Penetapan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 1/PNPS Tahun 1965 tentang Pencegahan Penyalahgunaan Dan/Atau Penodaan Agama." For a good overview, see "Prosecuting Beliefs: Indonesia's Blasphemy Laws," *Amnesty International*, November 2014, https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/_index-_asa_210182014.pdf. More detailed treatments are given in Melissa A. Crouch, "Law and Religion in Indonesia: The Constitutional Court and the Blasphemy Law," *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 7.1 (2012): 1–46, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/asian-journal-of-comparative-law/article/law-and-religion-in-indonesia-the-constitutional-court-and-the-blasphemy-law/E477329245DBCD94E688163F6CDE6F3B; Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Defamation of Religion Law in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: Is Revision Possible?," *Australian Journal of Asian Law* 13.2 (2013): 1–16, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2228476.

[4] Article 1 states, "Every individual is prohibited in public from intentionally conveying, endorsing or attempting to gain public support in the interpretation of a certain religion embraced by the people of Indonesia or undertaking religious based activities that resemble the religious activities of the religion in question, where such interpretation and activities are in deviation of the basic teachings of the religion."

[5] The original text of article 4 of the Blasphemy Law states: "Pada Kitab Undang-undang Hukum Pidana diadakan pasal baru yang berbunyi sebagai berikut: Pasal 156a, Dipidana dengan pidana penjara selama-lamanya lima tahun barangsiapa dengan sengaja di muka umum mengeluarkan perasaan atau melakukan perbuatan: a. yang pada pokoknya bersifat

Sukarno also declared that the government's recognized religions were Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The decree does not ban other religions or beliefs, such as Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, or Taoism, and their followers are in principle free to practice their religion as long as they do not violate other laws, though in reality they do face official and unofficial discrimination.

The use of the blasphemy law has mushroomed in recent decades. Under Sukarno it was never used, and under Suharto's thirty-two-year rule it was used rarely. Under Suharto's three successors—B. J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati Sukarnoputri—it was never used. The deluge of blasphemy charges came with the election as President of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2004. Yudhoyono strengthened the blasphemy law offices in the judicial system by creating branches in every province and regency.

During his decade in power, Yudhoyono's administration brought over a hundred cases to the courts, and in each case the accused were found guilty. In total, the law was used eight times in its first four decades, and 125 times under Yudhoyono. Several dozen other cases have occurred under President Joko Widodo, generally known as Jokowi, a lower rate than under Yudhoyono, but still disturbing.[6] The most dramatic case, and one which has affected the whole country, was the trial and conviction of Jokowi's friend Ahok.

IV. *Ahok's Trial and Conviction*

The 2017 election for the governorship of Jakarta attracted coverage from media worldwide and produced the country's worst divisions since the years following the fall of Suharto in 1998. The campaign entangled the

permusuhan, penyalahgunaan atau penodaan terhadap suatu agama yang dianut di Indonesia; b. dengan maksud agar supaya orang tidak menganut agama apapun juga, yang bersendikan ke-Tuhanan Yang Maha Esa." See Amnesty International, "Prosecuting Beliefs: Indonesia's Blasphemy Laws." A rough translation is: "In the Criminal Code, a new article is issued which reads as follows: Article 156a, Convicted with imprisonment of up to five years for anyone who deliberately publicly issues or acts: a. which is basically hostile to, abuses or desecrates a religion that is embraced in Indonesia; b. with the intention that people do not adhere to any religion, which is based on the Godhead."

[6] See Andreas Harsono, "The Human Cost of Indonesia's Blasphemy Law," *Human Rights Watch*, October 25, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/25/human-cost-indonesias-blasphemy-law. The law survived three constitutional challenges between 2009 and 2018, with the Constitutional Court stating that religious freedom was subject to limitations to preserve public order. In 2010, the court stated that these limits were to be defined by "religious scholars." See Daniel Peterson, "Blasphemy, Human Rights, and the Case of Ahok," *Asian Yearbook of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*, August 13, 2018, 52–94, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346888_003.

families of four former presidents, saw demonstrations by up to half a million people, widespread smears regarding religion and ethnicity, and multiple police investigations of senior political and religious leaders. It culminated in May 2017 with the imprisonment of the incumbent governor on charges of blasphemy.[7]

The trial and conviction of the governor, Ahok, was a watershed in the trend toward radicalization.[8] Ahok is both ethnic Chinese in a society with strong anti-Chinese sentiments and Christian in a country that is 87 percent Muslim.[9] However, he was an energetic and efficient governor of Indonesia's massive capital, achieved a 70 percent approval rating, and was widely expected to return to the governor's mansion in the 2017 election, perhaps to use this as a springboard to the vice presidency of the country, together with his friend and former running mate Jokowi. There are many photographs featuring Muslims supporting Ahok.

But, while campaigning in September 2016, he remarked that the qur'anic verse *al-Maidah* 51, warning Muslims against taking Jews or Christians as friends, was being misused by some people to claim that Muslims should not vote for a Christian.[10] Several days later, a video of his remarks that had been deceptively and mendaciously edited by BuniYani, a communications lecturer, went viral. The video dropped some of Ahok's words in order to make him appear to be criticizing the Qur'an itself. While the original video of the speech is readily available, the doctored version has, of course, received vastly more viewers on social media.

The Indonesian Ulama Council then issued a fatwa accusing Ahok of blasphemy, and the Islamic Defenders Front—a radical group hitherto noted mainly for attacking religious minorities and churches, as well as liquor stores and nightclubs that did not pay them enough protection money

[7] For background, see Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman and Prashant Waikar, "Fear and Loathing: Uncivil Islamism and Indonesia's Anti-Ahok Movement," *Indonesia* 106 (October 2018): 89–109, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/717836/pdf; Alexander R. Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8.1 (2020): 37–50, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/trans-trans-regional-and-national-studies-of-southeast-asia/article/rising-islamism-and-the-struggle-for-islamic-authority-in-postreformasi-indonesia/233273E8CD730E147E7B517EC702948A, https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.10.

[8] For some background on Ahok, see Jan S. Aritonang, "Christians in Indonesia," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Robert Hefner (London: Routledge, 2018), 262–63.

[9] 2019 figures from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, https://data.kemenag.go.id/agamadashboard/statistik/umat.

[10] "Ahok Apologizes to Muslims for Alleged Defamation," *Jakarta Post*, October 10, 2016, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/10/10/ahok-apologizes-to-muslims-for-alleged-defamation.html.

—called for demonstrations demanding that he be tried and imprisoned or executed.

Other groups joining the campaign were the National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa, the Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah, and the Jamaat Ansharut Tauhid. On November 4 and December 2, 2016, there were massive, largely peaceful, demonstrations against blasphemy, one of which drew over half a million people. This was an unusual display of strength for the hitherto marginal Islamic Defenders Front and suggested that senior politicians, the military, and other elites were manipulating sincere religious grievances for political purposes. They also likely helped fund the massive demonstrations—the thousands of buses, lunch boxes, and neatly printed signs and T-shirts gave evidence of the kind of money not previously associated with the Islamic Defenders Front and its usual allies —and indeed, Indonesians often refer to protestors as *pasukan nasi bungkus* or the "boxed lunch crowd." Meanwhile, some mosques in Jakarta hung banners calling on Muslims not to perform funeral prayers for deceased Muslims who had voted for Ahok. Some 266 such banners were removed in the city on March 14, 2017.[11]

Meanwhile, for their part, the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's and the world's largest Muslim organizations, counseled calm and advised their members to avoid political demonstrations and simply vote for those candidates they believed would contribute most to the public good. Despite these pleas, some senior members of both organizations joined in the accusations against Ahok. In the end, the moderate but massive and unwieldly Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah were outflanked by the radicals.

Ahok was charged and tried, though he continued to canvass votes, commuting daily between the campaign trail and the trial. On April 19, 2017, he lost, 58 to 42 percent. The prosecution then recommended the very light sentence of probation plus a one-year suspended jail term. However, on May 9, the five judges ignored this recommendation and sentenced Ahok to two years in prison. The following day, three of those judges were promoted by the Indonesian Supreme Court.[12] Ahok was released on January 24, 2019, because of the customary reduction of sentence for good behavior.

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[11] "More Hate Banners Removed in Jakarta," *Jakarta Post*, March 15, 2017, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/03/15/more-hate-banners-removed-in-jakarta.html.

[12] On February 26, 2018, Ahok appealed his conviction to the Supreme Court. The presiding judge in the appeal was the same judge who had presided over his conviction. "Lawyer: Judges Made Mistake in Ahok's Case," *Star*, February 28, 2018, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2018/02/28/ lawyer-judges-made-mistake-in-ahoks-case/#DdjKE4rTJ831AdgE.99.

The verdict split the country in ways not seen in decades. There had been widespread demonstrations in support of Ahok, but many of his defenders became afraid to speak out. It appeared to create tensions between the president and the military and the police, who tended to take different sides in the affair. Gatot Nurmantyo, then chief of the Indonesian military, publicly contradicted the national police chief, General Tito Karnavian, an ally of President Jokowi, about whether there was anything treasonous in the anti-Ahok demonstrations. In politically divided families, people refused to be in the same room with one another or attend each other's weddings.

The 2017 election had echoes of the 2014 presidential election, when Jokowi defeated Prabowo Subianto, son-in-law of the last dictator, Suharto, and a former special forces general accused of human rights abuses. Jokowi is the first Indonesian president from outside the military and political establishment. He and Ahok had campaigned together for governor and vice governor to run Jakarta in 2012, and both had won their respective offices. There had been rumors that Jokowi might be considering Ahok as his vice presidential running mate, and Prabowo and some of Suharto's children were believed to be planning another presidential run, perhaps hoping that current unrest would increase demand for expanded security and the firm political hand that a former general could provide.

V. *Accusations against the Accusers*

The proliferation of accusations and penalization of controversial speech made it all but inevitable that Ahok's accusers would themselves be accused of spreading falsehoods and insults.

On November 17, 2017, Buni Yani, the communications lecturer who had created and promulgated the tampered video of Ahok's talk, was himself sentenced to one and a half years in prison for spreading hate speech by manipulating the video, though strangely this did not affect Ahok's conviction.[13]

Then, Rizieq Shihab, leader of the Islamic Defenders Front and a leading instigator of the demonstrations, was investigated for blasphemy after reports that he made denigrating remarks about the Holy Trinity. He was then questioned concerning an allegation that he had insulted the official

[13] Arya Dipa, "Buni Yani Gets 1.5 Years in Jail," *Jakarta Post*, November 14, 2017, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/11/14/buni-yani-gets-1-5-years-in-jail.html. He was released on January 2, 2020; see "Man Who Triggers Ahok's Blasphemy Conviction Released from Jail," *Jakarta Globe*, January 2, 2020, https://jakartaglobe.id/news/man-who-triggers-ahoks-blasphemy-conviction-released-from-jail.

national ideology of Pancasila. The police also interrogated him about whether he had slandered Sukarno, Indonesia's revered first president and independence hero. He was then again summoned to answer accusations that he had mocked the new banknotes, accusing them of featuring Communist symbols. Finally, on May 30, 2017, he was charged under the pornography law for allegedly sending sexually explicit messages via WhatsApp to Firza Husein, who was herself arrested for treason for her role in organizing the mass demonstrations.

Rizieq, a graduate of Saudi Arabia's King Saud University, fled to that country, where he has remained.[14] His lawyer claimed he was a guest of the government there, which was covering all his expenses because he was a descendent of the Prophet. The Saudi government did not comment on the matter.[15]

This ongoing legal folderol suggests that the police were using multiple vague accusations to keep troublesome people in line. After all, few Indonesians face simultaneous charges for insulting the Trinity, Pancasila, a former President, or banknotes, not to mention engaging in pornography and consorting with a treason suspect.[16]

In June 2018, Presidential candidate Prabowo visited in Mecca to win his endorsement and promised to allow the Islamic Defenders Front leader to return to Indonesia without charges should he win. Rizieq returned the favor, telling his supporters that they must vote for Prabowo if they wanted homosexuality banned. In February 2019, the chairman of the Habib Rizieq Shihab Center, Abdul Ramadan, declared, "[Rizieq Shihab] said that if Prabowo won, he would go home."[17] But Prabowo lost.

VI. *Other Politically Charged Cases*

Ahok's imprisonment has been by far the most famous instance of a blasphemy conviction, but it is not the only one, and several others have

[14] "Eggi: Rizieq Pilih di Arab daripada Ditangkap," *Berita Satu*, September 14, 2017, http://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/452644-eggi-rizieq-pilih-di-arab-daripadaditangkap.html#.Wbqln5MBcVc.twitter.

[15] "Fugitive FPI Leader Rizieq's Expenses Being Paid by Saudi Government since He's a Descendant of the Prophet: Lawyer," *Coconuts Jakarta*, October 12, 2017, https://coconuts.co/jakarta/news/fugitive-fpi-leader-rizieqs-expenses-paid-saudi-govt-since-hes-descendent-prophet-lawyer/.

[16] The investigations into the accusations of insulting Pancasila and Sukarno were dropped in early 2018.

[17] Paul Marshall, "Religious Tension on the Rise in Indonesia," *Religion Unplugged*, March 4, 2019, https://religionunplugged.com/news/2019/3/4/religious-tension-on-the-rise-in-indonesia?rq= paul%20marshall.

also had political motivations. For its part, the Islamic Defenders Front threatened to report Megawati Sukarnoputri to the police for insulting Islam by labeling the it as "anti-diversity" and having a "closed ideology," something that they should normally have accepted as statements both accurate and praiseworthy. Megawati is one of Sukarno's daughters and is one of the most powerful political figures in Indonesia, a former president and the head of the largest political party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle.

A larger politically motivated event occurred on October 22, 2018 in Garut, West Java. Here a member of the Barisan Ansor Serbaguna (Banser) youth movement burned a flag of Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia, an organization now banned in Indonesia. A short video of the incident immediately went viral and was then quickly picked up by opposition-oriented television channels. Islamic hardliners speedily demanded that the flag burners be tried for blasphemy. Meanwhile, police arrested three people involved in the burning, although they were quickly released.

This seemingly small incident was the first use of religion, specifically accusations of blasphemy, against President Jokowi in the presidential race. It was also a challenge to the Humanitarian Islam movement and the moderation of Nahdlatul Ulama. Banser is the militia wing of Ansor, which is Nahdlatul Ulama's young adult wing. The notion of an Islamic militia will certainly sound worrisome to Westerners.

But Banser is a good organization—I have talked with its leaders on many occasions and have their gift of a Banser baseball cap. Its members are required to be unarmed and to coordinate all their actions with the police. They also guard churches in times of unrest. If you are, say, an Indonesian Christian, you would usually be happy to know that Banser is close by.

The background to the flag burning is that seventy thousand Banser members were traveling to Yogyakarta on 1,400 buses for the launch of an interfaith movement dedicated to countering extremism worldwide. This was due to culminate in a celebration of national unity on October 26 in a rally of 100,000, including myself, at which Jokowi was going to speak. The members were told to expect provocations along the way and were instructed to hand over any inciting materials to the police. With the exception of the one incident in Garut, these instructions were carefully followed.

Details are murky, but the Garut incident has the smell of a setup. Yahya Cholil Staquf, head of Ansor and general secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama, said that as part of a focused campaign of "provocation and sabotage,"

Hizbut-Tahrir personnel disrupted the youth wing's celebrations, which then led to the flag burning.[18]

Hizbut-Tahrir was banned in Indonesia in 2017 because of its illegal call for an Islamic caliphate to replace the Indonesian republic. Waving its flag may even be illegal. But that flag also contains the *Shahada*, the Muslim confession of faith, so that burning it would also burn a sacred text. The ambiguities of a sacred text blazoned on the flag of a banned organization opens the door to demagogy.

Many were outraged by the video and accused the Banser members of blasphemy. West Java governor Ridwan Kamil stated that he regretted the incident: "They were supposed to burn the symbol of an organization that had been banned by the government, but in my opinion, [the act] triggered a different interpretation." The Indonesian Ulama Council criticized Banser for the incident and said it should apologize but did not call for any punishments.[19]

On October 26, 2018, thousands of conservative Muslims took to the streets, and there were demonstrations throughout the country demanding that the flag burners be prosecuted. There were rallies at the office of the senior minister responsible for legal affairs. Many demonstrators carried Hizbut-Tahrir's black-and-white flag and chanted the creed written on it. One of the major groups behind these demonstrations was the National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa. Its chairman, Yusuf Martak, demanded that the Ansor chairman, Yahya Cholil Staquf, be prosecuted for the flag-burning incident.[20] The National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa was one of the major organizers of the campaign to accuse Ahok of blasphemy, which was discussed earlier.[21]

This incident was likely an attempted reprise of the political manipulation of Islam, and specifically of blasphemy charges, that were used in the 2017 election for governor of Jakarta, but now at the national level. Since

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[18] "Indonesia: Rally for Moderate Islam Halted over Fears of Violence," *Al Jazeera*, October 26, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/indonesia-rally-moderate-islam-halted-fears-violence-181026054738978.html.

[19] Kharishar Kahfi, "Suspected HTI Flag Burning Sparks Controversy among Muslims," *Jakarta Post*, October 23, 2018, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/10/23/suspected-hti-flag-burning-sparks-controversy-among-muslims.html.

[20] Marguerite Afra Sapiie, "Hundreds Rally Decrying the Burning of 'HTI Flag' by NU's Youth Wing," *Jakarta Post*, October 26, 2018, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/10/26/hundreds-rally-decrying-the-burning-of-hti-flag-by-nus-youth-wing.html?src=mostviewed&pg=news/2018/10/23/ suspected-hti-flag-burning-sparks-controversy-among-muslims.html.

[21] Paul Marshall, "When Blasphemy Runs Amok," *Providence*, May 1, 2017, https://providencemag.com/2017/05/blasphemy-runs-amok-ahok-indonesia-jakarta/.

Jokowi was due to address the mass rally, the accusations would taint him by association. They would also taint Nahdlatul Ulama, which took no official position on the election but whose members were often thought to be mostly Jokowi supporters, and Ma'aruf Amin, the former chairman of its supreme council was Jokowi's vice presidential running mate.

VII. *Other Cases*

Apart from blasphemy laws, Indonesia's stress on preserving harmony led to a 2017 election law whose Article 280c prohibits candidates from insulting others on the basis of race or religion. Even President Jokowi has been reported to the Elections Supervisory Agency under this section for his comments in the second presidential election debate criticizing his opponent Prabowo Subianto's vast land ownership.[22]

Another case involved Grace Natalie, who is, like Ahok, an ethnic-Chinese Protestant and is the founder of the Indonesian Solidarity Party, which is aiming its appeal at millennials. At a November 11, 2018, rally, one attended by Jokowi, she told the crowd to oppose discriminatory local laws based on "the Bible or sharia" and said that "religion-based bylaws victimize women." Almost immediately, Eggi Sudjana, a Prabowo supporter, accused her of sowing division and perhaps committing blasphemy. She was questioned by police for seven hours about these accusations.[23]

On November 25, 2018, Bakor Pakem, part of the Jakarta Prosecutor's Office (Kejati), a body within the Attorney General's Office charged with religious oversight and enforcing the 1965 blasphemy law, launched an Android app that allows mobile phone users to report any individuals suspected of "religious heresy." The app was made available on Google Play and includes a list of purported forbidden beliefs and banned mass organizations, a directory of fatwas issued by the semi-official Indonesian Ulama Council, and a form to report complaints or information about religious beliefs or sects.[24]

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[22] "Jokowi Reported to Bawaslu for Remark on Prabowo's Land Ownership," *Jakarta Post*, February 19, 2019, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/02/19/jokowi-reported-to-bawaslu-for-remark-on-prabowos-land-ownership.html.

[23] "Christian Politician in Indonesia Accused of Blasphemy," *UCA News*, November 2, 2018, https://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-politician-in-indonesia-accused-of-blasphemy/83914.

[24] Paul Marshall, "Indonesia, Google and the Surveillance State," *Religious Freedom Institute*, January 3, 2019, https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/blog/indonesia-google-and-the-surveillance-state.

There were repeated attempts to portray President Jokowi as anti-Muslim, something that he had attempted to guard against by recruiting Islamic leader Ma'aruf Amin as his vice-presidential running mate. On February 25, 2019, three Indonesian housewives were arrested because of an online video which claimed that, if re-elected, Jokowi would ban prayer and make gay marriage legal.[25] The video, now shared many thousands of times, showed two women in hijab headscarves telling an old man that Jokowi would end the call to prayer, force women to remove their hijab in public, and legalize gay marriage. Police spokesman Trunoyudho Wisnu Andiko told a press conference that the arrest was "a preventive measure because this [video] could potentially trigger anxiety and conflict."[26] Consequently, Jokowi sought to burnish his Islamic credentials further. Three days before the election, he even set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Other tactics used against Ahok in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election were again employed in the 2019 presidential election. In anonymous leaflets, Jokowi was accused of being a secret Christian and simultaneously of being linked to the disbanded Indonesian Communist Party. Islamists using the name Alumni 212, referring to the December 2, 2016 date of the biggest anti-Ahok demonstration, staged a reunion in Jakarta in which speakers declared that Jokowi had criminalized the Indonesian Ulama Council and was selling Indonesia to Chinese tycoons and foreigners. To counter these allegations, Jokowi distanced himself from Ahok, stressed the importance of Jerusalem to Muslims, came to the defense of persecuted Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and developed stronger ties with the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, as well as the military.[27]

Indonesia is not an Islamist state. In other situations, Ahok would be dead, perhaps at the hands of the government or, more likely, at the hands of radicals. This is not Pakistan, where after his prison sentence was completed, he would need to flee the country. After his re-election as president, Jokowi appointed Ahok the chief commissioner of the state-run oil company Pertamina, a very senior position, and on March 2, 2020, said that he was

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[25] "Indonesian Housewives Arrested over Election Video: Police," *Agence France-Presse*, February 25, 2019, https://www.nst.com.my/world/2019/02/463572/indonesian-housewives-arrested-over-election-video-police.

[26] Marshall, "Religious Tension on the Rise."

[27] Erwida Maulia, "Indonesia's Islamists Create Re-Election Minefield for Widodo," *Nikkei Asian Review*, December 27, 2017, https://asia.nikkei.com/Features/Asia-Insight/Indonesia-s-Islamists-create-re-election-minefield-for-Widodo?page=2; Karlis Salna and Untung Sumarwan, "Jokowi Boosts Ties with Indonesia Military in Power Shift," Bloomberg, February 15, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-14/jokowi-cements-ties-with-indonesia-military-in-political-shift.

one of four candidates to head the special authority agency of the yet-to-be-built new capital city of Indonesia in East Kalimantan—roughly equivalent to the position he held before as governor of Jakarta.[28] A person with a blasphemy conviction is now back now in high government office, but only after a jail term, humiliation, the corruption of an election, and a bitterly divided country.

Through social media, the opposition to Ahok extended far beyond radicals. Because of the viral video, many ordinary Muslims sincerely believed that he had deliberately insulted them, and in turn this genuine religious sentiment was manipulated by senior politicians, the military, and other elites, who also likely helped fund the radicals. These machinations were also aimed at Jokowi, Indonesia's president and Ahok's former running-mate, who had been rumored to be considering Ahok as his vice presidential candidate for the 2019 national campaign.

But this use of blasphemy accusations as a potent political weapon could only happen because blasphemy charges had been used increasingly in the previous decades. These polarize not only politics but the country as a whole.

Conclusions

The freedom to debate, reject, or criticize religious ideas is an essential element of religious freedom. In contrast, prohibitions on blasphemy reflect the view that, in the realm of belief, government should serve as the arbiter and regulator of ideological orthodoxy. Islam is a complex and varied belief system shaping the views and practices of many of its 1.6 billion followers in culture, politics, economics, science, education, personal and family relations, and law and society, as well as what is often called religion. Hence limits on criticism are major means of social and political control—they coerce religious conformity and forcibly silence criticism of dominant religious ideas, especially when those ideas support, and are supported by, political power.

In the Muslim world, such restrictions also help radical interpretations of Islam to crush debate and discussion about the nature of faith and religion. Nor will it produce tolerance. After Pakistani governor Salman Taseer was murdered for his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws, his daughter Sara correctly observed, "This is a message to every liberal to shut up or be

[28] Rizki Fachriansyah and Marchio Irfan Gorbiano, "Ahok among Four New Capital 'CEO' Candidates Handpicked by Jokowi," *Jakarta Post*, March 10, 2020, https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/09/jokowi-handpicks-four-ceo-candidates-for-capital-relocation.html.

shot." Here "liberal" is not a reference to contemporary American usage of vaguely leftist views but to a commitment to personal freedom per se.

As the late Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd, who had to flee Egypt for his views, has written, "coercively applied blasphemy laws narrow the bounds of acceptable discourse … not only about religion, but about vast spheres of life, literature, science, and culture in general."[29]

And as the late Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, and head of Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization, has written,

> rather than legally stifle criticism and debate—which will only encourage Muslim fundamentalists in their efforts to impose a spiritually void, harsh and monolithic understanding of Islam upon all the world—Western authorities should instead firmly defend freedom of expression, not only in their own nations, but globally, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[30]

When politics and religion are intertwined, as they necessarily are in debates about blasphemy and insulting Islam, without religious debate and critique there can be no political debate and critique.

[29] Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd, "Renewing Qur'anic Studies in the Contemporary World," in Marshall and Shea, *Silenced*, 293.

[30] Abdurrahman Wahid, "Forward," in Marshall and Shea, *Silenced*, xxi.

PANEL ON PUBLIC THEOLOGY

In order to help readers to reflect on the definition of public theology, *Unio cum Christo* invited thinkers and theologians with different perspectives to answer the questions below. We hope that the answers will help our readers better understand public theology. Some divergences emerge, but so does much common ground between those views. Robert George's answers are based on an interview conducted with Peter Lillback via Zoom; two additional questions and answers are included that were part of that conversation.

1. *How is your position fitted to address the problems of public theology?*
2. *Does natural theology have a contribution to make to public theology?*
3. *How do you conceive of law and gospel in relation to social issues?*
4. *What is the role of common grace in the present secular situation in the West?*
5. *What would be the best outcome of the present secularization other than Christ's return?*
6. *From your point of view, what is the major problem with other positions?*

NATURAL LAW POSITION

Robert George, Roman Catholic Philosopher, USA

1. How is your position fitted to address the problems of public theology?

I am not a theologian; I am a philosopher. Yet I read a fair amount of theology and find it very illuminating. My public theology consists of two things: theological reflection on issues in public life and the proclamation of the gospel in the public sphere beyond the Christian community, in the secular world. I believe that both are essential. Though I am not a

theologian, most of my work has to do with addressing issues in public life, and I freely and truthfully draw on theological works in my philosophical witness in the public square.

2. Does natural theology have a contribution to make to public theology?
Yes, I think it does. By natural theology we mean what can be known about God and spiritual matters on the basis of rational reflection, independently from "special theology" or revelation. By revelation I am speaking about what is revealed about God in Scripture and distinguishing it from what we can know about God from unaided reason; what can be known to such thinkers as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Cicero. They do not have access to the biblical witness but nevertheless reflect on life, ethics, justice, science, and scientific questions. So debates, for example, over the existence of God in the public square, with the new atheists, are useful and fruitful and illuminating. I think it is great for Christian thinkers, Christian philosophers, and theologians to engage issues of what can be known about God—that he exists, that he is supreme, that he has certain attributes—in debate with people who have their doubts about God or think that if he exists, he cannot be trusted.

3. How do you conceive of law and gospel in relation to social issues?
Well, we need them both. They are not in conflict or in tension. The gospel message includes teachings about what is just and unjust and how we ought to organize ourselves in communities and as societies; those are issues that are pertinent to law. The law, even our civil law, cannot be severed from the gospel. Here the witness of Martin Luther King Jr. is extremely helpful. He brings the gospel message to bear on questions of justice, especially regarding the lost. He had in mind segregation and the regime of Jim Crow, which were especially unjust to African Americans, who were deeply disadvantaged by these laws. So King understood law and gospel as integrally connected and bearing on questions of public and political life, including what the law ought to be and ought not to be.

4. What is the role of common grace in the present secular situation in the West?
Common grace is a phrase associated with certain traditions but is not commonly used in my own tradition, Catholicism. We are in the natural law philosophical tradition. I believe that in some Christian Protestant traditions, common grace is roughly equivalent to natural law in Catholicism, going back to Aristotle. Now natural law reflections or common grace is indispensable to our exploration of questions of morality and justice in

public life and beyond public life. Often, we cannot understand in depth the proclamation of Scripture without philosophical reflection. What Genesis 2 says about marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife illustrates this well: the notion that man leaves his father and mother and becomes one flesh with his wife (v. 24). Philosophical reflection is required to understand, for example, that Scripture here, or God speaking through Scripture, is not merely suggesting that marriage is just an emotionally intense relationship. To understand what the Bible is saying literally, we need to bring reflection to bear in understanding marriage's qualities and features—between a man and a woman, not two men or two women, or numerous partners. That it is something to be pledged for life—not for a term of years, like a business contract. That it has to be sexually exclusive; there must be fidelity. An open marriage is not really a marriage. Jesus reminds us that Moses's permission of divorce was aberrational and goes back to Genesis 2, the beginning (cf. Mark 10:5–9). For Jesus, the permission to divorce should not be under the redeemed and restored order, but marriage in light of the conjugal union is for life.

5. What would be the best outcome of the present secularization other than Christ's return?

The best outcome for the present is a just social order, for which we must strive. Justice is not the rule of the strong but the giving to each of his due, founded upon the dignity of each individual. Jews and Christians have understood this concept in view of the teaching of Genesis 1 that we, unlike animals, are made in the image of the divine creator and ruler of the universe (v. 26). In a just social order, the common good is favored not only by public officials but by all members of the community. Human beings are provided with conditions necessary for flourishing across a range of dimensions as biological creatures, rational agents, relational persons (not purely for individual ends). Our actions and choices, shaped by others, can make things good or bad and build character. But it is for the common good and justice that the conditions—including freedom of thought, speech, and religion—are established and maintained, that are conducive to our flourishing. Certain institutions, above all marriage and family, are essential. These conditions are all critically important short of the return of Jesus in glory. We ought to work for justice, considered not just narrowly as fairness, important though it is. (The liberal tradition has really gone wrong in narrowly focusing on just fairness.) Human flourishing is much richer and more variegated than that. Justice requires that we attend to the conditions of flourishing for all those dimensions.

6a. From your point of view, what is the major problem with other positions? This is highly theological, but I will let you take this question any way you would like.
I have benefited from reading Kuyper and the works of Kuyperians, and I find a lot to like there. It is not clear to me where Kuyperian ideas about justice and the common good and my own differ. I do not know theonomy well. I have read a little bit of the work by Rousas Rushdoony and just did not get it at all. The idea seems to be that you should run the world, even in circumstances of pluralism, according to Old Testament Jewish law. That strikes me as a bad idea for all sorts of reasons, including that there is not really a warrant for it in the Bible and there is much in the Bible that would seem to go against it. What I did read of theonomy did not interest me enough to make me want to read more. By contrast, I want to read more from the Dutch Reformed and the Kuyperian tradition because I think that is very illuminating and useful.

I am a natural law theorist and Catholic, although not all natural law theorists are Catholic. It is important to note that an understanding of the natural law, what can be known by unaided reason, does not imply you know everything you need to know to have a better society. That is not true. We know a lot about justice and the common good on the basis of reflections on natural law and natural rights, but our knowledge can be profoundly enriched by understandings beyond knowledge by unaided reason, especially by revelation. It has been enormously helpful to people like me to understand that there is a foundation to human dignity in that human beings are made in the very image and likeness of God. There is a divine law, and the principles we get from it are not out of bounds when it comes to thinking about justice and the common good. Also, from Genesis 1 and 2, we get that the created order is ordered, that it is intelligible. Not all traditions or civilizations got hold of that great insight. Further, the created order is good. God himself judges that it is good. That becomes the basis of all science, all inquiry. Something else, God sees that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18). There is a broader concern than the marital bond there. Our relationships with other people are not and should not be purely instrumental relationships; we are enriched by social bonds such as family ties, friendship, associations through shared convictions. Here again a profound insight into the social nature of man.

6b. We hear much about social justice today. Can we distinguish between justice and social justice?
The term social justice has been hijacked by a movement that is progressive and secularist in ideology. Prior to that it was a noble term used by Catholic

popes in the traditional Catholic social teaching. My conversations with James Kurth have illuminated my understanding of this tradition. In the Catholic social teaching, social justice simply means that category of justice that is concerned with society, whether political or nongovernmental social institutions. Those latter ones have, according to this tradition, the primary role in providing people with health, education, and welfare and transmitting to each new generation the values and virtues that are necessary if people are to lead successful lives and be good citizens. So social justice is about civil society and the political order and their relationship in this great tradition.

Yet that is not the whole of justice. There is also, for example, the justice that is required in the family, in an ordinary friendship, in a business partnership. But unfortunately, today social justice means something different and is bound up with identity politics, of Marxist inspiration, and therefore atheistic. The term has been used in an effort to establish secular progressivism as functionally the state's religion. So I think it is important not to be fooled by the high-sounding and once-noble phrase *social justice*. And properly understood, we should be working for social justice all the time. But we need to oppose that hijacked version of social justice.

6c. What would be your response to critical race theory that seems to be so tearing us apart?

Critical race theory names a whole lot of things. Although some has wisdom to it, a lot is misguided because it falls into identitarianism and tribalism and follows the idea is that the fundamental engine of history and society is conflict. This is Marxian. Indeed, critical race theory tends to buy into the idea that history and society are driven by conflict, yet not necessarily class conflict. In revisionist Marxism, following people like Herbert Marcuse, the conflict can be race, ethnicity, multiple genders, sexual orientation. These kinds of conflicts are what drives society. There can be no real hope for unity despite their differences unless they recognize a more fundamental commonality in virtue of having been made in the image of God. For Marx, conflict is unavoidable: someone is going to ultimately win, and someone is going to ultimately lose. Class conflict would drive the working-class people to the point of revolution, and they would prevail. Then, the classless society, the Marxist utopia, would be established. It follows that somebody has to exercise power in a sort of authoritarian fashion over other people who disagree. And, true to form, basic principles of justice, especially principles of civil liberty, go out of the window: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion. We invoke them when they help our side, but

we do not grant them to the people on the other side. When people on the other side claim them or appeal to them, we dismiss them as mere tools of oppression. I am very worried about that in academic life. The collapse of freedom of speech on campus by formal mechanism or most often by informal mechanism (the cancel culture, the shaming, the outraged mobs, the use of social media) are all pernicious manifestations of this conflictual model that you find in critical theories.

TWO-KINGDOM POSITION

David VanDrunen, Reformed Theologian, USA

1. How is your position fitted to address the problems of public theology?
I take "public theology" to mean theological reflection on public life. I present my position in detail in *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020). It sets public theology in a covenantal context. Specifically, it recognizes that God (re-)ordained the ordinary activities of human society after the great flood in the Noahic covenant (Gen 8:21–9:17), a covenant universal in scope and preservative in purpose. Grounding public life in the Noahic covenant has several benefits. First, it follows a general Reformed, covenantal approach to theology. Second, it explains why God is the sovereign Lord of public life and why public institutions are accountable to him. Third, it explains why participation in public life is not limited to Christians but open to all human beings, and thus also why Christians may and ought to work alongside unbelievers in the public square. Fourth, it has a robust theology of Christians as sojourners and exiles—always an important theme, but perhaps increasingly so amidst recent cultural changes. Finally, it utilizes a classical Reformed category (the two kingdoms, or twofold kingdom), and does so in a way consistent with the American Presbyterian revision of the Westminster Standards regarding the civil magistrate.

2. Does natural theology have a contribution to make to public theology?
I will take "natural theology" in the sense of the knowledge of God and his will made known in natural revelation. Understood in this way, natural theology is crucial for public theology. Scripture provides general teaching on the character of public life and the obligations of social institutions, and this teaching is normative. But Scripture provides nothing like a comprehensive blueprint for these issues. As Proverbs for instance indicates, God's people gain wisdom for ordinary life in great measure through experiencing,

observing, and reflecting upon the world around them. By this wisdom obtained through natural revelation, we come to perceive concretely how to live and work with one another peacefully, justly, and productively. Public life is impossible without this. These reflections may also point to another advantage of the approach to public theology summarized in Answer 1: The same Noahic covenant that (re-)established ordinary human activities also (re-)established the natural, cosmic order through which God reveals his nature, character, and will.

3. How do you conceive of law and gospel in relation to social issues?
All areas of life are under God's law. God reveals his law in different ways in different contexts, and it applies in different ways to different social institutions, but God's law is the standard for them all. The gospel, on the other hand, promises redemption for sinners, whom Christ now gathers into his church and will welcome into his new creation on the last day. All things will be redeemed in the sense that this present creation will attain its consummation in the new creation. But the gospel never promises the redemption of particular political, legal, economic, and other public institutions. Instead, God has established and preserves public institutions for provisional purposes here and now. I assume that when the question asks about "social issues" it refers to the affairs of such public institutions. Thus, God's law determines how we are to evaluate "social issues," and the revelation of the gospel does not change that. Of course, redeemed Christians ought to serve God and neighbor in public institutions as part of their grateful obedience.

4. What is the role of common grace in the present secular situation in the West?
It is probably true that the pre-secular "Christian" West often overlooked the importance of *common* grace and that our increasingly secular societies overlook the need for grace altogether. Nevertheless, the role of common grace has not changed as the West has become increasingly secularized. By common grace, administered through the Noahic covenant, God preserves and governs the natural world, human society, and public institutions within it. He does so for multiple purposes, most importantly to promote his own glory and to provide a forum for accomplishing his redemptive work. All of that is as true now as it was in the twentieth century, the sixteenth century, or the first century. It will remain true until Christ returns.

5. What would be the best outcome of the present secularization other than Christ's return?

The New Testament church was born in the first century into the very religious Greco-Roman world, yet it suffered severe persecution. There are obviously deep problems with our contemporary secularized societies, but thus far Christians, within these societies, have enjoyed broad liberties to worship, raise their children in the faith, and evangelize. In fact, Reformed Christians enjoy greater liberties now than they did in many so-called Christian societies before secularization began. One good outcome, then, would be that Christians continue to experience these liberties, even if they find themselves increasingly marginalized in public life. But in the big picture, the "best outcome" other than Christ's return is the same in our secular society as in any other cultural context: that Christians remain faithful under whatever adverse circumstances they face and continue to gather the harvest of Christ's elect into his church.

6. From your point of view, what is the major problem with other positions

Kuyperian: I assume that "Kuyperian" here refers to post-Kuyper neo-Calvinism (which has important differences from the thought of Kuyper himself). As I see it, neo-Calvinism's major problem is that it places an eschatological burden on Christians' ordinary cultural endeavors by approaching them under the categories of *redemption* and (Christ's eschatological) *kingdom*.

Catholic, Natural Law: There are many versions of Roman Catholic natural-law theory, and my evaluation would differ depending on which is in view. But even the best of them, I believe, fail to understand natural law in proper theological context. In particular, they do not place natural law in proper relationship to the biblical covenants, common grace, or the biblical, Reformation gospel.

Theonomist or Reconstructionist: Theonomists fail to account for the covenantal context of the Mosaic judicial laws. God instituted the judicial laws through the *Mosaic* covenant to govern a unique and holy people for provisional and typological redemptive-historical purposes. Political communities today are not under the Mosaic covenant and are not holy, redeemed, typological societies. Thus, the Mosaic judicial laws per se are not appropriate for them.

Philip Tachin, Reformed Theologian and Public Official, Nigeria

1. How is your position fitted to address the problems of public theology?
The comprehensive mission of God in the world provides the template for our cultural engagements. Our confessional and ethical principles are God's instruments of change such that while we work in the world, we are not of it. Our ethical pedagogy underscores the transformation of the whole person and society, not through a theocratic approach but by the evident sanctifying power of God in our vocations. Christ's recognition of the things of God and of Caesar provides an insight that avoids extreme theological postulations concerning public affairs. Rather, we are to be exemplars of citizenship. The overall objective of faith and life is to point to the glory of God by our words and conduct. The significance of my position is not only in avoiding extremes in the prevailing views but also creating a rapport between the secular and spiritual so that believers can be intellectually equipped to effectively engage the secular vocation with an evangelistic goal.

2. Does natural theology have a contribution to make to public theology?
This question concerns how we can beneficially understand our world and ethically align ourselves properly in the presence of God (*coram Deo*). Though the creation speaks volumes of God's glory, wisdom, and power (Ps 19), natural theology has its limits in answering the issues in theology proper and complex human society. Sin always obstructs our accurate understanding of the world and the will of God regarding how we should collaborate with him in governing the world to his glory. The natural man gives the glory of God to idols or denies him (Rom 1:19–20; 3:9–18; Pss 14:1–3; 53:1–4). However, Scripture gives us the proper interpretation that enriches our theological understanding and conduct. Calvinism teaches that all true knowledge begins with knowing God, and our love for him is the fountain of our love for our neighbor and our society (cf. Matt 22:37–39). By natural law or theology, we can appreciate that unbelievers are held accountable for negligence, but we know this truth only in Scripture (Rom 1:19–23). Natural theology is useful, but it is by the re-creative and redemptive power of the gospel that the natural knowledge of God comes to fruition.

3. How do you conceive of law and gospel in relation to social issues?
The social functional of the law is to create order by restraining moral evil. Calvinism sees the law as an instrument by which the state protects all groups of people in the society, the weak and strong. Therefore, the rule of law is what Christians should strongly advocate. The social issues that

concern the law should also concern the gospel, and there should be no selective justice in addressing the issues affecting humanity. Scripture provides explicit and implicit principles in dealing with social issues. Though the law condemns and the gospel offers hope, they are not antithetical; rather, they strengthen each other. The Bible and our confessions do not endorse either antinomianism or legalism but maintain a harmony between the law and gospel. The divine intent of the law is to regulate our thoughts, attitudes, and behavior in line with God's righteousness and justice. It serves as our guide to glorifying God in all that we do, whether in private or public (1 Cor 10:31). The gospel restores us to God to live in obedience in *all* things, just as Christ, who is the substance of the gospel, was not against the law but comprehensively fulfilled it.

4. What is the role of common grace in the present secular situation in the West?
By common grace the secular is better appreciated as God's realm where unbelievers are also endowed with various gifts. All truth, excellence, and beauty belong to God, and secular duties come under the realm of God in Christ. Christians, rather than separating from the world, should be involved so that the Spirit of God might nurture and cleanse it by demonstrating the righteousness of God. God works through civil governments to create order through laws that restrain the excesses of evil in society. The scope of Christian engagement is comprehensive since Christ claims every sphere, both in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18–20; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:3). Therefore, Christian involvement in politics, business, and civil society is biblical and should be encouraged. In all these areas, proclamation of the gospel in actions must be unambiguous. Common grace frees Christians from timidity for participation in world affairs.

5. What would be the best outcome of the present secularization other than Christ's return?
The eschatological reality posits a heightening antithesis between secularization and spirituality. By and large, secularization drives the global agenda without being inconsistent with the prophetic word of Christ on the principle of the "narrow" and "wide" gates (Matt 7:13). The forces of globalization, seeking to enforce secular principles that accentuate human autonomy and freedom, try to denigrate Christian principles, which favor the flourishing of economic growth, politics, and development. Modern secular views hold that religion is irrelevant because technological development that has brought about prosperity stands on secular foundations. However, the gospel insists that our undying agenda is to point people to the glorious

kingdom of God, not through legislation but by righteous actions in the wider context of the public square (Matt 5:14–16; Phil 2:15; 1 Pet 2:12; John 15:8; Matt 9:8). Just as Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12), so also our call to godly actions encompasses church and society. Believers have a comprehensive calling that shapes the preaching of the gospel and the reforming of society. God will continue to reconcile the world to himself in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:18–20).

6. From your point of view, what is the major problem with other positions
Kuyperian: Kuyper went to the extreme of making common grace foundational to culture and history, claiming that common grace, rather than the eternal decree of God, holds the creation together. This has no scriptural basis. Common grace is not correlative with the power of God or his providence, and its core point is ethical rather than metaphysical. Therefore, we cannot create a Christian state on the basis of common grace.

Two-Kingdom: This view limits the kingdom of God and the activity of believers to the institutional church, narrowing their involvement in secular society. Luther uses this dichotomy that parallels the law and gospel. In the two-kingdom concept, this dichotomy is so sharp that it is difficult to see how Christians can actively and meaningfully engage in the secular. This misses the comprehensive mission of God that has been entrusted to believers in the world.

Catholic, Natural Law: Catholicism has put unrealistic confidence in natural law by unaided reason to provide a "solid and indispensable" moral foundation for civil law. This seems contrary to Aquinas, who said, "The natural law—without the divine law—is inadequate to direct man to his final end, addressing the inherent shortcomings of human judgment, assessing a person's interior life, and punishing or forbidding all evil deeds by means of the human law."[1] Rather, biblical law enriches and informs natural law.

Theonomist or Reconstructionist: Theonomy holds that all things come under the sovereignty of God and claims that Old Testament laws are universally applicable in all of public life. It fails in its exegesis of Romans 2:12: God holds all nations accountable on the basis of natural laws that are concreated in the human conscience and not, as claimed, on the basis of the Jewish law. Jews and Gentiles come under the rule of God through distinct operational principles (cf. Luke 12:47–48).

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[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, I.II, Q. 91, art. 4, response; online: http://www.microbookstudio.com/.

KUYPERIAN POSITION

Richard J. Mouw, Reformed Theologian, USA

1. How is your position fitted to address the problems of public theology?
In the not-so-distant past, when theologians addressed issues in public life, they frequently did so under the headings of "social ethics," "church and state," and "political theology." In recent years, however, "public theology" has come to be treated as an acceptable theological subdiscipline. This is an important gain. The domain of the "public" is much broader than what was covered by those older rubrics. Public life encompasses what goes on in banks, editorial offices, stadiums, the aisles of supermarkets, neighborhood organizations, and much more. This broad scope fits nicely with Abraham Kuyper's manifesto that Christ is Lord over "every square inch" of creation. Theologians must pay attention to all that Christ cares about. A key emphasis in the Kuyperian strand of Calvinism is the insistence that God built the capacity for a complex "public" life into the original creation. The "fill the earth" mandate in Genesis 1 is about cultural development (v. 28). Human beings were to add to the primal Garden by cultivating family life, collective decision making, the arts, technology, economic patterns—all to the glory of God. Human rebellion introduced distorted cultural development, and God's renewing purposes in Israel, and then the church, aim at calling into being a redeemed people who would show forth his original cultural intentions in the midst of a fallen world.

2. Does natural theology have a contribution to make to public theology?
Natural theology is seen as what believers and unbelievers should—in principle, at least—agree upon on the basis of general revelation, without appeals to the contents of special revelation. Natural theology, then, presupposes the reality of natural, or general, revelation. If there is a natural theological understanding, it must be in response to theological truths that God has revealed independent of special revelation. For Kuyperians the important question is the degree to which sin has distorted the capacity of fallen human beings to grasp properly what God reveals in nature. The Reformed confessions strongly affirm that God reveals himself in the natural world, but they question the degree to which those living in rebellion against God can make positive use of these deliverances. The Westminster and Belgic Confessions, for example, see the primary impact of general revelation as leaving sinful humankind "without excuse" in continuing to oppose God's purposes (cf. Rom 1:20). When John Calvin argued that ancient "pagans" offer us teachings from which believers can gain truth—Calvin

was fond of Seneca's writings—he saw this not in terms of a "natural" capacity unaffected by sin, but as due to the bestowal of a "peculiar grace" —such that, Calvin argued, if we refuse to accept truth from these sources we "dishonor the Spirit of God." The deliverances of general revelation are not completely lost to the fallen human consciousness. The young child who responds to a parental verdict with "But that's not fair!" is manifesting a grasp of a basic sense of justice. But our sinful natures do not consistently benefit from these remnants of our original natures. Thus Calvin, when he credits the sinful consciousness with acknowledging God-honoring truths, does not rely on a "natural" capacity in fallen persons, but on the active working of the Holy Spirit in specific contexts. This emphasis is at the heart of Kuyper's "common grace" perspective, where God is seen as using the talents of unbelievers in positive ways to further the cultural development that God intends for his creation.

3. How do you conceive of law and gospel in relation to social issues?
Since God has ordered the entire creation in a lawful manner, his lawful ordinances affect both the nonhuman aspects and the various spheres of cultural life. Each cultural sphere has its own special character, with its unique patterns of authority. For example, the divinely ordained ways of exercising leadership in the family are different from the ways of exercising authority in the church or the university or the business corporation. Since these patterns have been corrupted by our collective sin, God calls his redeemed people to work at restoring his creating intentions. Reformed moral theology has always insisted—against, for example, Lutheran and Anabaptist ethics—that the law is fulfilled in the gospel's call to live a life of love. But for the Kuyperian, love takes different forms in different spheres. Familial love differs from the love the gospel requires among citizens of a nation, and the love that binds together a guild of Christian artists seeking to glorify God in their aesthetic pursuits differs from the way love manifests itself in relations within a farmers' cooperative. This Kuyperian attention to the ways in which biblical teaching has to be applied to patterns appropriate to diverse spheres accounts for the fact that this perspective has generated detailed contributions to the "theology of work." Faithful discipleship in a specific cultural sphere requires more than the individual qualities of honesty, a cooperative spirit, reliability, and a commitment to "personal witnessing." As important as those qualities are, our public engagements require a love of justice, stewardship, and promoting the common good. The law of the Lord extends to all areas of public life, and the life of love must therefore take the form of a public love.

4. What is the role of common grace in the present secular situation in the West?
God designed the original creation with the capacity for developing a rich and complex cultural life. Humanity's rebellion against God's creating purposes did not mean that this design was obliterated. By sovereign saving grace, God chose to call into being a redeemed people—Israel, and then the New Testament church—to continue to establish cultural patterns that would glorify him. But God also uses persons outside of the redeemed community to further his cultural program. Some of this happens by the mysterious ways of providence, whereby God restrains the cause of evil. Common grace teaching, however, adds an important dimension: God also shows a nonsalvific favor to non-Christians by harnessing their talents to add to the storehouse of what the Scriptures describe as "the glory and honor of the nations" (Rev 21:26). Unbelievers write excellent poetry and produce fine paintings. Atheists perform acts of justice. Muslim parents devote themselves sacrificially for the well-being of their children. In the workings of common grace God gifts unbelievers—again, nonsalvifically—to provide positive blessings to the human community as such.

5. What would be the best outcome of the present secularization other than Christ's return?
It could be that the continuing secularization of life would itself create conditions that would lead to a genuine spiritual revival. Secularization is a historical process of disconnecting various areas of human association from obedience to God-ordained norms—a process that Christians unwittingly promote when they limit the exercise of faith in God to matters of "personal faith." Kuyper argued that sphere sovereignty is also a historical unfolding, as spheres of cultural interaction gradually differentiate from each other. A common example among Kuyperians is the tribe, which, when it was a prominent pattern of collective identity, was a kind of merging or blending of spheres: the tribe was a kinship entity that also had political, economic, religious, and recreational aspects that have gradually unfolded into separate diverse spheres (family, state, economy, church, and sports). The downside of this historical differentiation is the fragmentation of "selves," a phenomenon that has been celebrated by the more radical expressions of postmodern thought: a person's role as a father has no integrative connection to his role as banker, basketball fan, consumer of online entertainment, or political partisan. The result is not unlike the condition of the Gadarene demoniac who told Jesus, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9). The result in the Gadarene case was a demonstration of Jesus's

sovereign power. It could be the same for what results in human lives from the fragmentation of selves. In the Christian arrangements, the multiple spheres are integrated by and in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We escape the fragmenting of our selfhood by submitting to his authority in a personal relationship with the One who holds all things together. In a time when fragmentation increases, it could lead many persons to recognize the devastating personal effects of secularization and to turn to Christ for the integrating power of salvation. If that does not happen, the situation is indeed a frightening one.

6. From your point of view, what is the major problem with other positions?
Two-Kingdom: There really is only one kingdom, presided over by the One to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given (cf. Matt 28:18). The Two-Kingdom view is certainly right to posit differences between, say, church and state, each of which occupies different spheres, with differing patterns of authority and focus. But those are only two of a larger number of unique arenas of cultural "business," with each of the arenas functioning under the direct rule of Christ. To live with the assurance that every knee will someday bow before him (cf. Phil 2:10) is for believers to honor him in the present as the One to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance in every sphere of life. The Two-Kingdom approach sees God's governance of public institutions beyond the church as "provisional," with all that they represent ultimately being "consummated" in the fullness of the kingdom of Christ. Thus, the claims of the gospel have no "redemptive" application to this larger public arena. Institutions such as art museums, stadiums, national legislatures, and banking systems have no eschatological significance. We Kuyperians insist that these spheres were present from the beginning in God's creating intentions, and what has been accomplished in human history in politics, the arts, and the like will not be "consumed" when Christ returns, but will be a part of what is transformed and refined when he makes all things new. The basic Kuyperian contention here is that God has multiple creating and renewing purposes for the creation. One of these purposes is, of course, saving sinful human beings and incorporating them into a new community of the redeemed. But the eschatological gathering in of the riches of culture is also a part of the plan.

Catholic, Natural Law: Kuyperians strongly affirm the reality of natural law. Our problem with the Catholic appropriation of the natural law idea is the emphasis on a shared human capacity to grasp properly the guidance that natural law provides. For us the underlying error here is the way Catholics, and Christians in some other traditions, endorse the notion of

prevenient grace. Catholics rightly accept the ways in which the fall into sin seriously damaged the human capacity to discern truth and goodness. But they understand God to have issued, in response to those realities of human depravity, a kind of "universal upgrade," whereby God restored the ability of all human beings to understand truths about God's will for human living and to make free choices for or against conforming to those truths. Like the Kuyperian teaching regarding common grace, prevenient grace is nonsalvific. But for the Kuyperian common grace is not a generic act of a partial repairing of human capacities for truth and goodness. Common grace has more of an *ad hoc* character. When, say, Seneca discovered a truth, it was because the Holy Spirit was working in Seneca's own heart and mind, nonsalvifically making use of the remnant of a rational capacity that was not completely eradicated in him by the impact of his fallen condition.

Theonomist or Reconstructionist: Kuyperians reject the Theonomist insistence that our social-political calling is to reconstruct in present form the revealed laws and policies that were given by God to ancient Israel in its national calling to establish and maintain a theocracy. We hold to the pattern of "principled pluralism," which means that we advocate for, and work to establish, a pluralistic social arrangement *as a matter of principle*. In a society in which persons of diverse worldviews and lifestyles live together, we want the right to configure our Christian communities in accordance with revealed truth, and we want this same right for groups with whom we disagree on fundamental matters. Muslims and atheists also have the right to configure their collective lives in accordance with their respective convictions. One advantage of this arrangement is that we as Christians are free to invite others to join us in living in obedience to the claims of the gospel without being accused of imposing our beliefs and values on others by employing political-legislative strategies. Obviously, this principled pluralism perspective has to face challenges regarding how to understand maintaining these patterns within a framework of promoting the common good of the larger society. But even those challenges can serve as opportunities. They motivate us to engage in dialogue with others about the implication of our respective worldview for our understandings the *common* good—which can itself open up opportunities for Christian witness as we await the coming of the fullness of the kingdom with the return of Christ.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama

PETER A. LILLBACK

(August 10, 2019)

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known by his Hakka Chinese nickname, Ahok, was born on June 29, 1966. He received his Bachelor of Engineering from Trisakti University, Jakarta, and his M.B.A. from Prasetiya Mulya, Jakarta. From 1992 to 2005, Ahok worked in corporate business. He was then elected to be Regent of East Belitung (2005–2006) before becoming a legislator in the Indonesian People's Representative Council (DPR; 2009–2012), Deputy Governor of Jakarta (2012–2014), and Governor of Jakarta (2014–2017). He was appointed in November 2019 to be chief commissioner of the state-owned oil and gas firm Pertamina.

PETER LILLBACK: *It is my honor to talk with you, Basuki. Thank you so much for letting me be with you today. Tell me, as we begin, a little bit about your journey to the Christian faith. Where did you become a Christian and how did that happen?*

BASUKI TJAHAJA PURNAMA: Actually, I became a Christian through my grandparents on my mother's side, but I learned more about real Christianity when I moved to Jakarta in my high school years. Especially when I joined reverend Dr. Stephen Tong's annual seminar: *Seminar Pembinaan Iman Kristen* (SPIK, Christian Faith Edification Seminar). There have been several series for years. So, I learned deeper theology and Christianity, especially Reformed theology, so I became a member of the Momentum

bookstore in Tanah Abang, which is also a part of the Reformed Evangelical Church of Indonesia (Gereja Reformed Injili Indonesia, GRII). Dr. Tong published many videos and recordings and books on all kinds of topics. Then, when I moved back to my hometown and worked in a mining company, I had time to learn more through these.

PL: *Where is your hometown in Indonesia?*
BTP: My hometown is a very small place called Belitung Island, which is about a fifty-minute flight away to the north of Jakarta and is a part of the province of Bangka Belitung. If you ask, "Where is Bangka Belitung?" It is between Sumatra, Singapore, Java, and Borneo.

PL: *While you were there, you entered into the political realm. How did that happen?*
BTP: Actually, I am from a business family, but I learned many things about theology, especially from Reformed theology. I learned from Dr. Tong's sermons about the European Reformation and Switzerland. He would always say, "Do you know why the most accurate watches are made in Switzerland? Because they had a Reformed movement there and did everything for God's glory." From him I learned that we need to move to the public square, and all our history is based on change because many people from the church who are informed by God's Scripture move into the open that is like a marketplace, especially in politics. I realized that I had to be an example to others how to be a public servant.

PL: *How old were you when you decided to apply that faith to the public square?*
BTP: It was a long time ago, after three to five years of heart searching. I was afraid to join politics because my grandfather was a businessman, and being of Chinese descent, we have certain values. He would always say, "Having a thousand friends is not enough, for if you make a single enemy, you will have trouble." So, you can imagine that if you got into politics and were to go against the common current in politics, you are likely to have many enemies. That made me feel uncomfortable, but after several years of being unable to help poor people, I remembered my father's advice before he passed away. He said, "If you have one billion rupiah and divide it into five hundred thousand rupiah monthly [a basic salary for the common people at that time], you can only share with two thousand families. But, if you become a regent or mayor in our city, you control all the budget for the poor and the needy." I still thought it was impossible. I reasoned, we are of Chinese origin and I am a businessman and I had a good business and we

would always fight with corrupt officers. However, after my father passed away in 2003, I resigned from serving the church [Gereja Kristus Yesus] where I had been a sort of chairman [*ketua majelis*] for thirteen years and decided to join a political party.

PL: *And what position did you pursue then?*
BTP: At first, I just thought that I wanted to become a mayor in my hometown to help poor people so that they would not need to come to me because even if I had wanted to help them all, I could not. That is why I just thought of becoming a regent—we call it *bupati*—so I could help poor people. After working a while there, I was already providing free education, free healthcare, and much more. I then realized that they need a retirement fund, like a pension fund for the senior citizens, so I asked my governor to provide social security to help them.

The governor then said, "If you want to do that then you will have to fight me to become the governor. You have a smart and clever idea."

I thought, "How can I do that? I am just a regent and do not want to become governor." But, in that situation, I also believed that this was God's grace working. The fourth president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), provided me with a political platform and supported me to run for governor, but at that time I lost.

PL: *So, you lost the election. Did you decide to run again?*
BTP: Yes. After that, I thought of resigning and going back to doing business, but the people told me, "You cannot resign; you always said that you need power to increase our welfare and to administer justice." They kept on saying such things, so I decided to run again. They suggested, "Please run again as a national parliament member." I ran again and became a national parliament member and represented my province.

PL: *How many terms did you serve in that capacity?*
BTP: Not many terms. In fact, people say I am the only person in this country who has never finished a term. Later, I realized that it was a promotion from God, but at the time, I felt like I had failed. People accused me of being ambitious and stupid, and never putting thought into my actions. I served as a local parliament member for only seven months. Then, I ran as a regent and was regent for another sixteen months. After that, I ran for governor [of Bangka Belitung] and had to resign when I lost. Later, I established an NGO [nongovernmental organization] that became a party [Perhimpunan Indonesia Baru, the New Indonesia Alliance] in which I was

the secretary. Afterwards, I wanted to run as provincial governor [of Bangka Belitung], but people said, "How come?" In my opinion, if you are an Indonesian citizen, you can run for any position; it is the right of any citizen. However, people always say, "You are not one of us, you are not the same as us, you do not believe in the same religion as us, therefore you cannot run."

But I said, "No! We can run everywhere we want."

However, many political parties and my friends do not believe this; although they know that our law gives us the right to do this, they are always trapped with the idea that they are an inferior minority. They think, "I am a minority; hence I cannot do anything."

I said, "No! My father always taught me that I am not a minority; I am a citizen like anyone. We believe in meritocracy, so why do you have to look at my eyes, color, and faith?"

After a couple of years my party fired me because I wanted to run in Jakarta as deputy governor [of DKI Jakarta Province], which was against the party's regulations. So, I ran for election in Jakarta. When people asked me, "Why are you running? Can you become the governor of Jakarta?" I replied, "I do not care whether I could be a deputy governor or not, I just want to be an example for all of you to see that if someone becomes the deputy governor, then that person must do what they have to do, especially administer justice, provide free education, free healthcare, and help poor people to have the same opportunities to increase their quality of life. Even if they do not want to vote for me as their deputy governor, at least I have an opportunity to showcase how to be a deputy governor." That was what was in my mind. [Ahok became a governor when Jokowi, his running-mate in the Jakarta provincial government, was elected as the president of Indonesia in 2014.]

PL: *What were the Christian values developing in your mind as you were moving up the political ladder?*

BTP: First, the Christian values in the Reformed faith include *sola gratia*, what I have today is by the grace of God; second, *sola fide*, I have faith in Jesus Christ. I do not know what I will become one day, but I know that I just want to trust and obey as God's witness wherever he puts me because I do not know where he wants to put me. Like before, I would never have imagined that I could become a governor, although I prepared myself in case I would become the governor. I cannot say, "God, give me a divine vision," or "Tell me if I should be the president," neither have I ever received an illumination from reading a book that I would become a governor, a regent, or a president. But I know I have to fight and stand firm for truth, justice,

and humility. So, what robe do I have to wear? I must put on compassion, kindness, humility, righteousness, and patience, even though sometimes as a human being I fail to accomplish these things. And I thank God that I served in jail for almost two years and experienced a reconditioning. Although I was struggling and was stressed for a couple of weeks, I then realized that this is God's way to teach me.

PL: *Before we talk about your experience in jail, tell us how you became the governor of Jakarta.*
BTP: According to political calculation, becoming the governor of Jakarta was impossible. But I knew that if I wanted to become a showcase, it would be good to do it in the capital city. But I did not know how I could become the governor of Jakarta. At first everyone said it was impossible. I just thought and said that I wanted to be a governor. How? By depending on God, and I thought, "If God wants me to be a governor, he will provide a way." If not, I would have been fine with that.

What happened seems to many people to be a coincidence, but I believe that it was God's providential control. When I was a parliament member, somebody asked me to run as governor. He wanted to use me to show that he was not racist towards the Chinese and Christians. We joined the Nationalist Party, which is now my party, PDI Perjuangan [Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle], and I was told, "You be the deputy governor of Mr. Jokowi." I did not care about being a governor or a deputy governor, or even only as a deputy governor candidate because according to political expectations, we would not win. The opposition candidate was rich, strong, of Betawi ethnicity—which means that he had grassroots support—and had worked as a bureaucrat from a young age. We came from another city, did not know anything, and had no money; so at that time, I thought that maybe God wanted me to be a deputy governor candidate only. We won the first round, but it was not enough (we needed to gain more than fifty percent to win). I thought maybe God only wanted us to reach the second round and lose there. But instead, we won, which was amazing. I thought again, maybe God just wanted to use me as a deputy governor until the end of the term. If it was God's will, I would run again for a second term as a deputy governor. Being deputy governor would be the endpoint, and that was good enough for me. At that time a radical group demonstrated every week against my inauguration.

PL: *Why would they be against you? What made them stand against you? Was it because you got there illegally?*

BTP: No, they protested because I talked about my belief in Jesus Christ as God. For them (Muslim people), Jesus Christ is not God but just a prophet.

PL: *So, the resistance was religiously motivated?*
BTP: Yes, this issue would then bring me to jail because they have a verse [in the Qur'an, *Al-Ma'id* 5:51] saying, "Never choose someone with a different faith to be your leader."

PL: *So, can you explain exactly the Muslim perspective and how you responded, as well as how that created a legal matter that caused you to end up in jail?*
BTP: Most of the Indonesian Muslims are moderate Muslims. Only about ten to twenty percent have a different perspective. They would never vote for me. That is why, when I quoted their verse, they tried to bring me into jail. But, for us, we always love everyone, and for me, what is most important is that I stand firm for truth, justice, and humility. I do not care about your faith; but, if you were to ask me about my faith, I will explain why I believe in Jesus. If you do not believe, that is your right. But, as Stephen Tong argues, we challenge them by asking, "Why don't you believe? You asked about my faith and I stood firm for my faith, as is my right."

PL: *But it is not against the law to be a Christian in Indonesia, so how did they put you in jail even though it is legal to be a Christian?*
BTP: They accused me of blaspheming their religion.

PL: *How did they say you blasphemed?*
BTP: Some guys that are in jail now looked at one of my videos that is almost 2.5 hours long and shared only fifteen minutes from the whole video. The video was shared with a written caption: "I think this is blasphemy."

In the video, I said, "Do not be fooled *by people* who use a certain verse in the Qur'an," *not* "Do not be fooled *by this verse*." Most of them just shared the video clip from the press conference in Thousand Islands (the place where it was held) without even being there in the press conference area. A large demonstration followed demanding that I serve time in jail.

PL: *How many were in the demonstration?*
BTP: They claimed there were seven million people, but I think it was only about five hundred thousand to a million. Some of my friends jokingly said, "Only you, in our whole national history, could gather that many people together."

PL: *So how long was the trial?*
BTP: Every week, I would go on trial for about fourteen to fifteen weeks.

PL: *So, you were an active governor while on trial for blasphemy?*
BTP: Yes. Every Tuesday, I would go to court while I was still working in government, and they brought me to jail. This had only happened in Indonesia once during an act of military aggression by the Dutch government when they put an active governor in jail.

PL: *It would be fair to say that when you were an active governor, legally elected, you were misrepresented and accused of blasphemy falsely but found guilty and sent to jail. That is injustice, isn't it?*
BTP: The attorney only asked for me to be given a warning and said that if in one or two years I repeated the same offense I would go to jail for one year. Trial execution is like that, but three out of five judges condemned me in advance. We know that a judge has the right to make the decision, but it is uncommon just to make the decision according to the verdict from the attorney general. But this time they advanced it. That is just what happened.

PL: *At the same time, your policies as a governor were highly honored. What were some of the things you did that blessed the city that would have been evidence that you should have continued as governor because you were making a positive impact on Jakarta?*
BTP: Before these accusations, about seventy percent of people were happy with my policy. I advocated that bureaucrats should be servant-bureaucrats, unlike a king served by the people. That is why we changed all the subdistrict offices in the city to become a one-stop service for every regulation they could make decisions on. Secondly, I created the software called QLUE, whereby people could report on everything through their phones, and this system automatically gave notifications to my subdistrict head. I was calling the subdistrict head, district head, and also the mayor [the Governor of Jakarta is the leader to whom five mayors in Jakarta—Central, North, East, South, and West—need to report] of the city to become like a caring father and mother to the people. They acted as an estate manager but also like a pastor caring for the people. I also provided for them good hospitals in the district area for poor people. If family members were hospitalized, the family could save the cost of cooking and caring for them. I also provided low-cost apartments. I knew that poor people with a low salary could not afford good education, health programs, and housing, or pay insurance.

But if we followed their desire for an increase in salary, production costs could not be met by companies; besides, their skills were too low to get a good salary.

So how to solve this problem? I talked with some businessmen and the labor force. I argued that laborers should not demonstrate for an increase in salary, because the companies would fire them as they employ too many people; rather, they should work hard with minimum salary, and I would provide them as government free transportation and scholarships for all their kids, and an ATM card, linked to a bank savings account, to buy subsidized food, and you would not have to rent a low-cost apartment but just pay the maintenance service charge. How much should they pay if they follow my policy of moving them from the riverbank?[1] Only under half a US dollar a day. So if you just pay five thousand rupiah, and your salary is above three million, you would have a free shuttle bus for the kid, [2] and your kid would get a scholarship, and you would get free hospital services; these policies would then make an opportunity to change their destiny and their kids could study.

Further, it never happened in this country that the capital city could control inflation. For the first time, we got a reward because we were the first city to control inflation. How did we accomplish this? We managed it because the subsidies were focused on the poor and I knew them because I had subsidized the people who hold this scholarship cards. That was the way I provided for them.

PL: *It is my understanding that while you were governor, the city stopped flooding. Is that true?*

BTP: Yes. Although the flooding did not stop in all parts of the city, it decreased by more than seventy-five to eighty percent. I asked the property companies to take responsibility. I said, "You do not need to bribe me. If you increase your building (make it higher, thus exceeding what is allowed in the government rules), you can pay by contributing in the infrastructure. You do not need to give me money [as penalty]."

PL: *So you were addressing problems by getting rid of corruption then.*

BTP: Yes, I always believe the main problem, the root of everything in

[1] The people who lived in the poorer neighborhoods close to the riverbank have been relocated so that measures can be taken to prevent the yearly flooding. The government relocates them to apartments and even furnishes the apartments.

[2] The transportation is provided as a solution to the objection that the move forces children to go much farther to school.

Indonesia, is corruption. The way to combat this is by making everything transparent, including my policy. That is why I broadcast our plenary meetings every Monday using our YouTube channel. In this way, every citizen could know what happened, what decision I made, and why I made the decision, and nobody could arrange for kickbacks from businessmen. We made it transparent, including money matters. There was no cash under the table in my administration; all payments were made by bank transfers. I believe that using bank transfers provides good recording, which includes records of helping the poor and needy.

What if the poor did not have a bank account? I would open them a bank account before transferring money to them. We taught people how to use the card, which is why today in Jakarta, most people are starting to use cashless services. How do we control them? We have a bank which is controlled by the city provincial government. I asked permission from big private banks to lend to a person who would work in my government bank and the amount would be returned after the initial setup had been done. What I wanted was to teach people how to use their card and cashless services. They could pay using the ATM card, which made them very proud and convinced them that they are human beings with a future and a hope. That was most important for me. To help the poor have the same rights and opportunities as others. But there was a need for discipline in using money. So there was a system where they could not draw all the money at once, but at the end of the year if they had some savings, they could buy whatever they liked. Sometimes they bought bicycles, laptops, skateboards, but that was good. I also developed many public spaces [RPTRA, Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/ Child Friendly Integrated Public Space] that are friendly for kids and disabled people—a place for poor people to gather and talk with people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, and tribes and to get to know one another.

We also had a good health care department. There was a hospital in every sub-district. The doctors and nurses have to "knock on the door, serve with the heart," as we call it in Indonesia, making records of the common problems people have. So I could gather information and know the issues.

People ask me why I needed noncash transactions. Let me give an example. I could find out in my system why a student on scholarship would purchase diapers for the elderly every week. At first, I thought maybe he wants to sell it for money, but through my "knock on the door" program, I knew that it is because his grandfather was paralyzed. I also subsidized beef that we import from New Zealand: the market price was ninety-five thousand rupiah per kilo, I sold it to them forty-five thousand rupiah. I subsidized fifty thousand

rupiah. That was why our subsidy programs are very clear and focused on the right people. A student could buy one kilo to cook for their family. If they have three children, they can eat three kilos of beef in one month. That was how I increased their nutrition. That is the total program. I want it to be holistic. It starts with the pregnant moms; they have to do check-ups with the doctor and provide their kids with good nutrition. If kids under twelve years old have a bad nutrition program, we will have a problematic generation in the future.

PL: *Do these ideas flow from your Christian values?*
BTP: Yes. I read my Bible every morning and get illumination from what people did in the Bible, so I learn. It gives me strength and courage to stand firm for this. That is why I know that everything is from God's grace. I just need to put my faith in Christ and Scripture. The Scriptures are good for teaching and correction; they give a right path according to God (2 Tim 3:16).

PL: *OK, you were doing these things as a Christian leader, but apparently many Muslims liked what you were doing. They liked your policies.*
BTP: Yes. Most of my friends agree with me. They think it is good. We share the same values with them. I think we only differ about five percent, which is probably due to humanity reasons. We are almost similar ninety-five percent of the time. The five-percent difference is basically we believe that Christ is God and they do not. But this five percent is a very significant difference. But we could agree when we talked about humility, truth, and justice. I did not want to comment about their experience or history. I did not want to have too many arguments about what happened to their prophet. If you talk about that, they will send you to jail again. That is another problem. So I have to be very careful when I touch this part now.

PL: *So you have discovered that your Christian values made a significant impact but that the blasphemy charge part brought you to jail. You went to jail even though you were the governor. How long were you in jail, and tell us what it was like to be there.*
BTP: They sent me to jail for twenty-four months.[3] But it was good, just like a master's program: two years. And like you take a master's program or have a holiday, I got a remission for three and a half months and served in the jail twenty and a half months.

[3] The name of the jail was Mako Brimob, which an abbreviation of Markas Komando Korps Brigade Mobil (headquarter command of the Special Police Troops, a paramilitary organization that handles counter-terrorism, riot control, etc., like SWAT).

At first, I felt maybe I was wrong. As a human, I did not understand why God allowed all this happen. I tried to find what I was guilty of. Why did God send me into jail like this. There are many examples like Nehemiah and Jeremiah. As I read, I realized that even Jeremiah said the same things. He did not want to talk the truth, but God asked him to talk. I am in the same situation; I am already here and said nothing wrong. But as a human, I was stressed.

I woke up every hour on the first day. Every hour of sleep felt like a deep sleep. We had to sleep at 10 p.m. every night, but I slept and woke up at 11 p.m. Only one hour, and so I slept again. And I woke up at 12 midnight, and slept again.

After two weeks, I woke up at 2 a.m. and suddenly felt like I had a heart attack. There was pain in my chest and my head felt very hot. I called the guards and cried for help and they came asking about what happened. I told him that maybe I have a heart attack. He only looked and could not do anything about it. He said I could take a run outside; it is very common for first timers that come to this detention center. But I thought, "If I run, this is a mobile police center—what if they shoot me?" I said, "No, I do not want to run," so I went back again.

When I returned, I realized I had not had a heart attack. I felt OK but wondered why I felt the chest pains. I tried to find out. I prayed to God and asked him, but I did not get any answer. After two hours, I suddenly got an answer. It was hatred in my heart because I was angry that all this had happened to me. I did not believe it was because God gave his permission. Then I realized that without God's permission, nothing can be done to me. So I prayed to God, "Give me your heart for forgiveness (to forgive others who have wronged me)." I prayed for half an hour from 2 a.m., and at 4:30 a.m. I fell asleep. After that I did not wish to appeal my case to the supreme court. I said, "I want to serve my time here. This is a good retreat in my life."

PL: *So you learned that hatred and unforgiveness is as painful as a heart attack but the gospel frees us and gives us peace when we forgive.*

BTP: That is described in Philippians. After I read the Bible, I got that verse—then you will experience God's peace that exceeds your understanding, which will guard your heart and your mind (cf. Phil 4:7). That is very interesting. And every time I got stressed, I knew what to do, I prayed to God, "Please let your peace rule over my heart and teach me how to be thankful." We should be thankful that God called us as one body. What am I thankful for after that? Every morning I saw the sun rise, I gave thanks to

God. This was the best doctor that I ever have had, because I had been too busy. From Monday to Friday I got to see the sun rise *every day*. Secondly, I could exercise. When we are too busy, we neglect exercise. Thirdly, I got to sleep at the same time every day. I never did that outside jail. Fourthly, I ate at the same schedule for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The most interesting for me is, my last meal for dinner was before 6 p.m. Then I fasted for almost twelve hours. When I slept at 10 p.m., my stomach was empty. That was a good diet. Fifthly, I had a lot of time, I wrote on A4-sized paper, 620 pages in total, about the insights I got from reading the Bible.

PL: *So you have a book going to come out based on that, right?*
BTP: I hope that in October it will come out.

PL: *What would the book be called?*
BTP: Call it *BTP*. Because my real name is BTP, you know. It is a personal journey. Ahok is too rough. I did not wear the good robe of righteousness before. I said I only have compassion and kindness, but I did not have humility, did not have gentleness, did not have patience. That is why it was a good retreat. And sixthly, I had friends. We could sing. I learned to sing in jail. Before in church, it was lip synching, that's all.

PL: *Tell me about the book that came out. It is by others who have written about your work.*[4]
BTP: This is an interesting book. I began to serve in the jail on May 9, 2017, and my birthday is in June. Most of my friends wanted to give me a gift. They wanted to write about what happened in this country, so from the former president, the media, artists, and culture enthusiasts, they selected fifty-one persons. Just like my birthday age, fifty-one years. So they prepared this book, and the publisher printed three thousand as a gift, with no need to pay. They brought it to the detention center. They gave it to me, and I read it very fast. I read fifty-eight books in jail. So after I read the book, I talked to my staff and said, "Maybe I am done. It is better to find a job for myself. I never think I will serve in the jail. All of you go back and find yourself another job. I will give you your salary or bonus."

Most of my staff said, "No sir, you are not finished yet. Your story has just begun." Sometimes I feel ashamed; they are more faithful than me.

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[4] Aditya Sani and Neneng Herbawati, eds., *51 Years of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama: Ahok Through Their Eyes* (Jakarta: Basuki Solusi Konsultindo, 2017).

Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama

PL: *What would you think the next chapter will be?*

BTP: At that time, I was thinking, "Maybe I just want to find a job." [So I said,] "Regarding this book, how can I help you to pay your salary?"

[They said,] "We try to sell this book sir."

"How much you want to sell it for? How about 250,000 rupiah?"

They said, "We cannot, because you already sold the small book *A Man called Ahok* for 250,000 rupiah. If you sell this big one, the same price, then nobody will want to buy the first book or they will get angry with you."

"So how much do you think we should sell it for? I think it should be over one million."

"That is crazy sir, that is too expensive."

"No, I will write something for them. And the sales from this book will help me, help my family expense, and for you, for the company to set up the office."

"What if nobody wants to buy?"

"We will try."

In twenty and a half months, you know how many books we sold? Eighteen thousand. We never thought this could happen. I have always believed there are four big factors in my life: one, God's providential

control; two, we are specially chosen; three, nothing to fear; and four, needs will be provided for. That is what I always believed, and if this is God's path, we follow and have nothing to fear.

PL: *Are there still more politics ahead for you?*
BTP: I am in politics again. I am in a political party. My party is called PDIP (Partai Demokratik Indonesia Perjuangan). Its ideology is nationalist, established by the founding father, the first president. Now, the chairwoman of the party was our fourth president, Ibu Megawati.

PL: *So your faith has sustained you through all these times. What message of the Reformed faith would you like to share with people who will have the joy of reading this interview?*
BTP: If you have a Reformed faith and life view, wherever you are, you will be a patriot for your country. In the market place, you will work for reformation in every aspect in country and life. That is what I believe. As a teacher, doctor, or lawyer, you become a Reformed lawyer or doctor. You only need to read your Bible every day to get illumination from God. Do not misunderstand what I am saying; the Bible never tells you what you have to become. It never tells you like that, straight forward. Let me correct myself lest some people misunderstand what I am trying to say. Some people asked me, "What is your next chapter? What do you want?"

I replied, "To be a politician. I want to be a president, a start-up president."

"What do you mean start-up president?"

"There are millions of start-up companies, but only one or two percent become unicorn companies. That is the same; this is my hope for this country. A Chinese descendant, a Christian, shares the same rights and responsibility in this country, and we have the right to be president. Even if you do not want to vote for me, I do not care. This is just what I want. However, the Bible never tells me I can be a president. It teaches us how we can be certain, stand firm in our faith, make very difficult decisions with the illumination of this Bible."

PL: *You are now internationally famous because of your difficulties; news stories all around the world have been written about you. How do you see the responsibility of your new fame is going to be used in your life?*
BTP: Initially when I was in jail, I thought I would be a preacher or pastor. But I learned that that is not my calling. I want my life and my family to become like a showcase for God's transformative power—a showcase for people to see that we have a living God, to see that Jesus Christ is my

mentor and the Holy Bible is the most illuminative book in my life. That is what I want to share. When you face difficulties or problems, you have to use God's perspective. What you face does not defeat you but actually promotes you. My experience has become famous in the whole world because of my situation. That means it did not defeat me but promoted me. Secondly, we have to look at this not as pulling us back from our God-designed destiny but as pushing us forward. God has already tailor-made robes of righteousness for us, so they are suitable for us to wear. That is what I want to share with people.

PL: *Well, you have been very gracious to do this interview, and I am very appreciative. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share as we conclude?*
BTP: To the readers, I hope that when you read this you will always remember me in your prayers. I am also a human and need support from other children of God (brothers and sisters in Christ). This job is not easy. Also pray for my wife, my family, and my mother; they are my coworkers. We need that. Because I became a showcase, I hope I will not fail and displease or bring shame to God's name in what I do.

PL: *Let us conclude and let me pray for you. May I do that?*

> Lord, I thank you for this opportunity to be with my brother Ahok. Thank you for Basuki's strength of commitment to be faithful to you in adversity. Thank you for his love for your Word and our risen Christ that has allowed him to love those who have opposed him, to love his neighbor, and to care for the poor. Would you anoint him in a mighty way. We thank you for the impact of Dr. Stephen Tong's ministry upon his life. We thank you for the role of the Reformed heritage. Would you use all these things for your glory and bless this brother, his family, and these next chapters of his life, including the impact of this book and as he speaks. We give it all to you and praise you for these things. In Jesus's name, Amen.

I want you to know I had the joy of visiting you in the governor's palace, I had the joy of visiting you in the prison, and now I have the joy of interviewing you today, and each time I have been blessed. Thank you so much.

At present, since November 2019, Basuki has been appointed to be the chief commissioner of the state-owned oil and gas firm Pertamina. In fulfilling his role, he is assisted by two deputy ministers.

Some of Ahok's achievements:

- 2006, Gold Pin from Fordeka (Democracy Forum),
- 2006, "Ten Figures Who Change Indonesia," *Tempo* magazine
- 2007, Anti-Corruption Figure of 2006, Three Pillars Award, The Three Pillars of Partnership Coalition
- 2013, Bung Hatta Anti-Corruption Award for integrity and innovation in campaigns to achieve budget transparency
- 2015, Gratitude Award, Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission, for success in controlling gratuities within Jakarta Provincial Government
- 2016, Gus Dur Award for brave, assertive anticorruption action
- 2017, "100 Global Thinkers," *Foreign Policy* magazine, for opposing Indonesian fundamentalism
- 2019, Roosseno Award for work ethic, high integrity, and creative ideas for the public

CONTRIBUTORS

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LOOKING AHEAD

In the next issue of *Unio cum Christo* 7.1 (April 2021), "Pastoral Theology and Practice," we will continue to address public theology in relation to the ministry of the church. The journal will include an interview with Dr. Greg Polland on the COVID-19 pandemic, short reactions by church leaders around the world to the current situation, and book reviews originally planned for this issue (October 2020).

In addition, we will feature the following two review articles:

Gratitude Needs a Giver: Why *Political* Science Needs Intelligent Design / **BRIAN G. MATTSON**

George Will's *The Conservative Sensibility* / **PETER A. LILLBACK**

SELECTED ARTICLES ON PUBLIC THEOLOGY FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES OF *UNIO CUM CHRISTO*

1.1–2 (2015)
Witness in the Public Square / **JAMES W. SKILLEN**
Persecution of Christians Today / **THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER**

2.2 (October 2016)
Editorial: Freedom of Conscience: The Reformers' and Ours / **PAUL WELLS**

3.1 (April 2017)
The Black Church's Response to the Racialization of Abortion in America / **EMMITT CORNELIUS JR.**

3.2 (October 2017)
Whose Rebellion? Reformed Resistance Theory in America: Part I / **SARAH MORGAN SMITH AND MARK DAVID HALL**

4.1 (April 2017)
The Distinctives of "Two Kingdom" Theology / **JIM WEST**
Whose Rebellion? Reformed Resistance Theory in America: Part II / **SARAH MORGAN SMITH AND MARK DAVID HALL**

4.2 (October 2018)
Transgender: Trans-ition to Nowhere / **PETER JONES**
Sexuality and the Lost Proletariat / **NOEL WEEKS**

5.2 (October 2019)
On Earth: Relational Anthropocentricism in Creation Care / **ALESSANDRO PICCIRILLO**
The Relevance of Calvin's View of Work and Calling to Christians in New Industrialized Countries / **MATTHEW EBENEZER**

These articles and others from previous issues of the journal are available online at

uniocc.com

CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR *UNIO CUM CHRISTO*

The editorial committee invites the submission of articles (7,000 words maximum including footnotes) for future issues of the journal. Articles should be rooted in the Reformed faith and its confessional texts, and aim to be informative, edifying, missional in perspective, and relevant to current challenges facing the Christian faith worldwide.

We would like to encourage theologians (including research students) and pastor-theologians, particularly from countries in the developing world, to submit articles on issues relevant to the role of Reformed theology in their national and cultural contexts, and also book reviews.

We would also be pleased to consider texts translated into English that have already been published in journals in other languages.

Submissions will be peer reviewed before acceptance.

Upcoming numbers of the journal will present the following general themes:

2021/1 Pastoral Theology and Practice
2021/2 Pastoral Theology and Preaching
2022/1 Economics and Business
2022/2 J. I. Packer and Global Anglicanism
2023/1 Biblical Counseling

Dates of submission of completed articles are six months before the appearance of the journal in April and October.

Before submitting an article, contact Bernard Aubert (baubert@wts.edu) with a proposition of subject and an abstract (less than 200 words). Details concerning formal presentation will then be communicated to the author together with approval of the proposition (Guidelines of Style are available at uniocc.com/journal/guidelines).

Paul Wells
Editor in Chief