

Reformed Politics

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Chapter 1

Our Political Calling

What is politics? A simple question, but the answer is not that simple. Rev Stam once wrote the following about politics:

“To some the word *politics* suggests shady business and dishonest dealing for self-enrichment. The current inability of politicians to solve national and international problems has caused many people to despair of politics and distrust politicians. Still, every nation must have a policy by which it is governed and every concerned party must have its politics, a theory and practice to manage public affairs to the benefit of all.

Perceptions of Politics

“In politics, then, we are concerned with the theory and practice of government. Which underlying principles shall be followed in governing the land? Which goals (short term and long term) do we set for our nation? How do we propose to achieve these goals? These questions, and more, we face in politics.

Definition of Politics

“Notice the close connection between *theory* and *practice*. At the basis of all political action is a specific political theory, philosophy or belief. In political programs also, we seek to realise our ideas and ideals. There is no real political party that does not base its practice on some philosophy, be it atheistic or God-fearing. And, in politics there must be a healthy, corrective interaction between theory and practice. One may not try to realise one’s own ideas at every cost, so that (as in the communist philosophy) the end sanctifies the means. Neither may we fumble about haphazardly without a basic political philosophy. Perhaps here lies the cause of much political bumbling today: politicians either cling tenaciously to an unworkable political doctrine or have discarded all doctrine whatsoever, simply floundering on a day-to-day basis. Often we are flung between political leaders with an overdose of vision and those with a total lack of vision. The result is, at best, uninspired or sloppy politics.”¹

From theory to practice

To reword Rev Stam, politics is about the theory and practice of Civil Sphere of Politics

¹Stam, Cl. *What about Christian Politics? Reformed Perspective* Vol 1 No 8, (Aug 1982) p. 4

Authority. It is not merely restricted to the legislating assemblies of parliaments and council chambers. It includes the public servants: the police who enforce the laws, the courts that apply the laws, and the many departments that deal with specific areas of life. Anything that has to do with the authority in a state is politics.

Revolutionary and Reformed Politics

Revolutionary Politics

All sorts of different perspectives of politics exist in our time. But, although their methods may be quite different, they tend to have one thing in common. That common thread is the belief in the autonomy of man: man as the sovereign. In essence, people are good in themselves and as such are able to govern themselves. This is executed in the spirit of the French Revolution (1794): “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” All people are equal, with equal rights to happiness. These rights are best realised in a “democratic society”. Such a society is, by definition, one in which the citizens are the ultimate rulers. They elect representatives to speak for them and to make their laws, but these representatives must follow the wishes of their electors. Take for example Modern Socialism. It clearly depicts the Arminian concept that man is capable of doing good. A good example of modern socialism at work is the Australian Labor Party. Since man is sovereign, so also the State is a law and an end unto itself. Thus the spirit of the Revolution prevails.

Reformed Politics

Reformed politics does not embrace the errors of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” It is anti-revolutionary, against the Revolution, for Reformed politics seeks to be guided by the will of God, not that of man. It will maintain the “Sovereignty of God” and reject the “Sovereignty of the State.” The State is not an end unto itself but unto God.

Basis of Reformed Politics

Such politics is motivated by the belief that all life, including public and social life, is to be developed to the glory of God. The Civil Authority is appointed by God. It is primarily responsible to Him, and must in each and every policy reckon with His sovereign will. This is the essence of Reformed politics: glorifying God and beneficial to the people in the deepest sense.

The Broader Struggle

Reformed politics is not just against the French Revolution. Rather, it takes up the struggle against the Revolution that took place in Paradise. It is from this Revolution that all revolutions stem. Each day again the wheels of world politics grind against the saving work of Christ. Reformed politics works because of this saving work. By His resurrection and ascension Jesus became King of Heaven and Earth.² To Him is all the authority!

Political Involvement

Abhorrence

Despite what has been said so far (that Reformed Politics is anti-revolutionary and maintains the sovereignty of God), Reformed people today are loath to mix with politics. Its very nature turns them off. Politics is a dirty business; it is the devil’s playground. Children of God should not be involved in it at all. But consider for a moment who the ultimate ruler is. Isn’t it Christ? Then how come the sphere of authority, which Christ heads and leads, is such a dirty

²Eph 1:19–23

business? Shame on us for running away. Elijah tried the same when he decided that his work was futile. But God said, “No, Elijah, the work must continue.”³

There are also others who are simply apathetic. There is a very great danger that we become Laodiceans. To them Jesus told John to write the following, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.”⁴ We are comfortable too: we have churches, schools, homes, and God blesses us materially. We think we have arrived. But we’ve hardly begun. Let us open our eyes. For Christ wrote to the Laodiceans: “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”⁵ The promise to the Laodiceans was that they would be kings if they obeyed. Yes, rulers, politicians with a majority!

The cultural mandate features prominently in the discussion of politics — we intend to study it in depth in the outline dealing with the purpose of Creation and Mankind. God set us on this earth with a mandate and a goal. We are to glorify Him by working in and with His Creation. We are to rule over it. The Fall has prevented us from doing this perfectly. But that does not mean we no longer have to work to fulfil it. On the contrary, through the gracious gift of His Son, God has renewed in us the proper understanding of what it means to praise God, and of what it means that God is all-Sovereign.

The Civil Authority, appointed as it is by God, should seek to fulfil God’s will. Since we, who are His children, know what God’s will is, do we not have all the more reason to participate in the field of politics than those in the world around us? After all, Reformed politics works because of Christ’s saving work.

The Belgic Confession states that the primary purpose of the civil authority is “... that the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order.”⁶ Can the unbeliever really do this? Will the “democratic” system of “doing the will of the people” satisfy this God-given mandate?

But this is not the only reason why we, as Australians and Reformed people, are called to participate in politics. There is a second reason. In the Old Testament Moses, on the advice of his father-in-law, set up a judicial system among the Israelites.⁷ Just before his death, he also gave instructions concerning the king of Israel, should he arise.⁸ Throughout the Old Testament, people vested with authority were respected and praised. It is said of the virtuous woman that “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.”⁹ Thus Israel’s system of civil authority demanded that people be involved in the political scene.

In the New Testament this was different. Nowhere do we read of people being told to strive for positions of authority. Rather, the call to obey is repeated

³1 Kings 19

⁴Revelation 3:15–17

⁵Revelation 3:21

⁶*Belgic Confession*, Article 36

⁷Exodus 18:17–23

⁸Deuteronomy 17:14–20

⁹Proverbs 31:23

regularly.¹⁰ During the time of the New Testament the political system did not demand that the people be involved. This does not mean of course that there was no room for Christian involvement. However, one only became involved by appointment or through inheriting a civil office. Thus Peter says, “Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him [the emperor] for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.”¹¹

Political involvement in Australia The Australian Constitution allows people to be involved in politics. In fact, our nation is one of the few that has compulsory voting.¹² Our civil authority demands that we be involved. And we must obey that civil authority. Not only does God command us to fulfil our God-given mandate, in Australia He gives us an open invitation to do so as well. Thus we do well to take this God-given opportunity.

Our participation God calls us to participate in the sphere of politics. Not all of us are called to become politicians. But the sphere of politics is not merely restricted to legislative assemblies. On the contrary, as citizens of a country we are made to participate in politics. In Australia there is also much freedom to express one’s thoughts. Opportunities abound around us to make known the will of God to the powers that be.

The need to study However, before we can even begin participating in politics, we must know precisely what God’s will is. We need to study before we can put it into practice. Let us search the Scriptures, test the spirits, and learn from our fathers what we need to know. Let us strive to fulfil the God-given mandate, to go out conquering and subduing, and finally to be honoured by receiving a share of Christ’s throne.

¹⁰eg Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1–7, 1 Peter 2:13–17

¹¹1 Peter 2:13a, 14

¹²Introduced 25 July 1924 by an act of Parliament

Chapter 2

The purpose of Creation and Mankind

Politics is related to the State, to any community of people. And, in particular, politics concerns itself with the theory and practice of Civil Authority. As such, politics does not stand apart from God, for, “There is no authority except from God.”¹ But, on the other hand, politics is not something special. For Paul says, “In Him all things consist”,² something even the heathen Greeks acknowledged, “In Him we live and move and have our being.”³ The place of politics

Politics is then part of the created order. As such, it must also serve to the ultimate purpose of Creation. And it is through man that politics receives its functioning. Hence, the functioning of politics is intertwined with man’s actions. Thus in studying the principles of politics it becomes necessary to understand the chief purpose of creation and God’s plan for mankind, and then to make clear the position of politics within that framework.

Creation

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”⁴ God stands at the beginning, before the beginning. Thus everything existing finds its existence in God. Everything was created by His hand. We have here a profound mystery with many aspects of which we must say, “I [do not] concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me.”⁵ We are not able to understand the *how*. But God has revealed to us the *why*. The fact of Creation

The Scriptures reveal to us that God stands at the ultimate end. John heard, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”⁶ And Paul wrote in one of his doxologies, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”⁷ The purpose of Creation

¹Romans 13:1

²Colossians 1:17

³Acts 17:28

⁴Genesis 1:1

⁵Psalms 131:1b

⁶Revelation 4:11

⁷Romans 11:36

The nature of God

God is the only being that has existence in itself. Hence God, as absolute sovereign, has no motives that extend outside of Himself; God did not create for the sake of the creatures, but for His own sake. Here human comprehension fails. Let it be enough to confess, “The Father . . . has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures . . . (giving) to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator.”⁸ Hence it is that the Psalmist calls upon Creation to praise God⁹ and states, “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your Name in all the earth.”¹⁰

The creation of man

Within all this stands man, that very special creature. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”¹¹

The purpose of man

Man is a special creature because he is God’s image. Man was created to reflect God in his actions and very being. Man was created to be as gods on the earth.¹² Concerning this Calvin says that man’s whole life and not just selected parts of it must glorify God.¹³ Being the very image of God and not image bearers (the reflection in the mirror, not the mirror itself) man uses the earth to praise God. God is King of the Universe, man is king on earth. Being God’s image entails three mandates:

1. Knowing God His Creator rightly (as prophet)
2. Loving Him heartily (as priest)
3. Living with Him in eternal blessedness (as king)¹⁴

Man is of course still a creature, a part of creation. Hence the above three mandates all have the same one aim in mind: to praise God’s glory.

In Paradise

And thus in Creation man worked to increase his knowledge of God, to develop his love for Him and to have dominion over the earth. Man was perfect. As van Bruggen puts it, “This knowledge (i.e. of God the Creator) was pure and certain in Adam; it was also sufficient for the moment but capable of development.”¹⁵ And as he later states, “Man had not yet reached his ultimate destination at the time of creation.”¹⁶

After the fall

The fall

And then man fell from the position God had created him in. In Augustine’s words, “Man had the ability not to sin. Had he made the correct choice, this would have become the inability to sin. Sadly, it became the inability not to sin.”¹⁷ The fall of man and subsequent curses had of course no effect on the ultimate purpose of Creation. The goal remained the glory of God. However,

⁸ *Belgic Confession* Article 12

⁹ Psalm 146-150

¹⁰ Psalm 8:1

¹¹ Genesis 1:26

¹² cf Exodus 4:16, Luke 3:38

¹³ Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.xv.3

¹⁴ van Bruggen, J. *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*, p.34 (A6)

¹⁵ van Bruggen, J. *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*, p.34 (A4)

¹⁶ van Bruggen, J. *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*, p.34 (A9)

¹⁷ Quoted in van Bruggen, J. *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*, p.35 (A9)

man of himself became incapable of fulfilling this task. Creation became subjected to futility¹⁸ so that the Preacher concluded, “Vanity of vanities. All is Vanity.”¹⁹

Man was not capable of restoring what he had shattered. Only God is. And God does it. He promises man to restore him, promises him deliverance from the bondage he put himself into. And all this through a Divine Plan of Salvation, against a mystery so deep that we humans cannot comprehend it but can only acknowledge its existence and purpose as Paul did, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”²⁰

As a result of the fall, man’s (and Creation’s) path to fulfilling the ultimate purpose has changed somewhat. No longer can man praise God of himself, no longer can man be a pure image of his Maker. There is now a need for Christ; Christ restores man to his former position. “(Put off), concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and (put on) the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”²¹

What effect then does the Fall have on Creation and man’s way of life? The structures of creation remained, but the methods of those structures changed. Before the fall God commanded, “Be fruitful and multiply.” After the fall He said, “You shall bring forth children.” Again, before the fall God said, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.” After the fall He also said, “You shall eat bread.” But now instead of ‘freely’, “in the sweat of your face.”²²

So in fact that we have fallen does not mean that we only sit around waiting to be saved so that we may continue where we stopped when we fell. Paul asks, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! . . . We also should walk in newness of life.”²³ We do not only pray, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”, but also, “And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one”. We do not only strive to put off the bad, we are called to strive to put on the good. In our imperfect way we are called to continue fulfilling our cultural mandate. We must continue to work for God’s honour and glory, for even though our sins are covered by Christ’s blood, we offend God by our sin.

There is also an added dimension to man’s task. For in falling man has also lost the ability to fulfill his special tasks: to know God, love Him, and live with Him eternally. Hence, man has received the task to encourage all men to praise God. It is the duty of those who by God’s grace know Him to call others to the knowledge of their Maker.

Before we step over to politics, a brief summary:

1. The purpose of creation is to praise God.
2. The purpose of man is to be God’s image.
3. The fall puts an end to man’s desire to praise God and his ability to be His image.

¹⁸Romans 8:20

¹⁹Ecclesiastes 12:8

²⁰Romans 11:33

²¹Ephesians 4:22-24

²²Respectively, Genesis 1:28, 3:16, 2:16, 3:19

²³Romans 6: 1,4

4. Christ restores both the desire and ability, but only in the elect.
5. Hence man is called:
 - (a) to work out his salvation; and
 - (b) to fulfill the Cultural Mandate so that ultimately
 - (c) he may praise God.

The Ultimate Purpose And Politics

The Bible and History

Does this have any implications for political life at large? Again we turn to the Scriptures. As a whole, the Bible is not the book of Jewish histories. It does not begin its history with the first Jew (Abraham) but with the first man (Adam). Nor does it end with the Jews of the first century AD, but with the last day and the return of the second Adam. Nor is the Bible only a spiritual history. It is a book that describes real people in real historical situation. It describes the history of this world. Hence politics forms an essential part of it.

All mankind called to serve God

God calls on all people to recognise His glory. In the Old Testament, “Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry.”²⁴ And in the New Testament, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’”²⁵ And when Christ has returned, “And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in (the light of the Lamp of the Lamb), and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it.”²⁶ Thus also politics is a vehicle to the ultimate goal: the praising of God’s Holy Name.

It then becomes clear how politics serves to further these goals. Later outlines will discuss the precise ways in which politics works within the framework of God’s eternal decrees. But the following can be said now.

Never forget the purpose

The ultimate purpose of Creation must never be forgotten. In the words of Jeremiah, “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”²⁷ In other words, God is in control. Is this something that God’s children recognise whenever they engage in political affairs? In striving to get someone a seat on the local council, in state or federal Parliament, do we remember, at all times, that “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ?”²⁸

Never forget the method

Nor must the way to achieving the ultimate purpose ever be forgotten. Scripture also teaches us that the praise of God’s Name cannot be separated from the work of the Son, “I am the Way,” Jesus said, and, “the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.”²⁹ And, “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,

²⁴Psalm 2:10-12a

²⁵Revelation 14: 6-7

²⁶Revelation 21:24

²⁷Jeremiah 10:23

²⁸Phillipians 3:20

²⁹John 14:6

not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”³⁰ Thus the children of God are called to witness to the world. It is only by works through faith in Christ “that God may be praised by us.”³¹ Christ said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”³²

But this does not mean “forget about politics.” For we have been created and do live on this earth. “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years.”³³ These years are not spent in idleness but in praising God, not only by calling men to repentance, a task that fell on us after the fall, but by fulfilling with our minds and hands that very task given at Creation: to be God’s image. A political calling

Being God’s image means doing what God does. A consistory is Christ’s representative on earth. Likewise authorities are God’s representatives on earth.³⁴ We return to the first text quoted, “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”³⁵ Before the fall man was commanded to have dominion and thus to be the image of God who is sovereign. Governments typify this authority. So, just as after the fall, God becomes known as a punisher of wrongdoers, a government is called “God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”³⁶ The civil authority as God’s image

Because we live in a depraved state, this does not happen. Just as a single person is not God’s image perfectly (“even the best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin”),³⁷ so too authorities have come under the bondage of sin; think of Babel, Babylon and Rome. And hence we, whether we form part of the authorities or not, must strive to make the system fulfil its purpose. We are called to “put off the old nature and put on the new.”³⁸ So too governments must change from old nature to the new. The effect of our depravity

And thus God’s Name is hallowed, that is, “Grant us first of all that we may rightly know thee, sanctify, glorify and praise thee in all thy works in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, mercy and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life - our thoughts, words and actions - that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised.”³⁹ Even in politics!

³⁰2 Peter 3:9

³¹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 86

³² Matthew 6:33

³³ Psalm 90:10

³⁴ Matthew 18: 18-20

³⁵ Romans 13: 1

³⁶ Romans 13:4

³⁷ *Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 62

³⁸ *Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 88

³⁹ *Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 122

Chapter 3

The Nature of the State and its Civil Authority

In politics we are concerned with the functioning of the state. Its therefore beneficial to make a detailed study of the nature of the state What is a state? What is its purpose?

The State

A state can be defined as a group of people living within a boundary governed by an authority. Definition

Notice that there are three aspects which must all be present for a state to exist: a self-sufficient population, a defined territory, and a single system of authority. According to our definition, then, a family unit is not a state because the population (family members) is not necessarily self sufficient within the boundaries of the family home. However Western Australia is a state and so is Australia as a whole.

To attain a good background of the nature of the State, especially as we know it today, we should search for the beginnings of the State. How was it formed? Who established it? The origins

The Bible, our first source of reference, quotes many examples of a state. We think of the nation of Israel. They were a population with an authority (Moses, the 70 elders, etc) but had no territory. So God gave them Canaan. Canaan was the promised land, a foreshadow of the ultimate State.

So was Canaan the first mention of a state? Surely not. Babel is a prime example of a state where the population was no longer God-fearing. And therefore God destroyed the one state and formed many (smaller) states.¹ We could go further back in history.

Prior to the Flood Cain built a city.² The three criteria of a state were all met. We may safely assume that there was an authority from the customs of those days that the eldest in the family also became the rulers.

Could we venture further back? Was there a state before the fall into sin? A State in Paradise?

¹Genesis 11:1-9

²Genesis 4: 17

Certainly there was a population, Man and Woman. The Garden of Eden had a distinct territory. The question which may be asked is: was there a system of government? The Belgic Confession states that God has ordained kings, princes and civil officers because of the depravity of mankind. God did this “in order that the licentiousness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted in good order.”³ From that we *could* conclude that there was no state in Paradise.

There is, however, another side to this point. Certainly the nature of the State changed after the fall. Prior to the fall there was nothing to be restrained. But what about good order? Who decided what had to happen when? God commanded that the earth had to be filled and subdued.⁴ Someone had to decide where to plant the apple tree and how far away the vineyard was to be established. someone had to organise the work so that it would be done efficiently, i.e. to the honour of God’s Name. Even though there was no sin, that would not happen automatically. Even the angels, sinless as they are, have a form of government. An example is the Archangel Michael. An Archangel has authority over an angel.

The Civil Authority

Definition

The authority is that integral part of a state known as a Civil Authority. “Civil” means “relating to the citizens of a state.” A state does not exist unless it has a ruling body which decides its laws and upholds them. How that civil authority is chosen need not concern us here. An election may be held, a ruler may be an heir to the throne or someone may rule by overpowering the existing ruler in a duel. The method does not matter here. What does matter is that it is a legal government. Legal by the laws of the particular state. It is to be noted that those laws may not necessarily be in harmony with Biblical principles. That, in itself, does not give God’s children the command to disobey the government. The Jews had to pay to Caesar what was owed him even though the emperor was not a theocratic king.⁵

Its mandate

But what then is its task? As a part of a State what is its role in the maintenance of the State?

The Civil Authority must:

1. protect people against threats by others,
2. uphold rules that promote the interaction of people,
3. guard against gross public infringement of God’s Law.

Protection for citizens

Firstly the Civil Authority must protect people against threats by others. Here we can think of a national defence system, i.e. protection against another state. The Bible teaches us that nations will rise up against other nations.⁶ It is not wise that each individual member of the State would try to protect his own property. It is far more effective if they group together into an army to

³ *Belgic Confession*, Article 36

⁴ Genesis 1:28

⁵ Matthew 22:21

⁶ Matthew 24:7

defend the state. God condones the existence of soldiers, both in the Old and New Testaments.⁷

This task of protection extends to all people, and not only to those who are members of the state that the Civil Authority has jurisdiction over. Refugees from other states often require protection. We are called to do good to all men.⁸ But how far does this protection extend? People are to be able to live in harmony with each other. Is a government to legislate in the private lives of its citizens? What about their religions?

People who are not citizens

Secondly, the Civil Authority must uphold rules that promote the interaction of people. Earlier we employed an example of the apple tree. Many factors had to be taken into account before a final position for it could be found. It had to be planted a certain distance from the houses. Not too far away and yet not too close either. A path had to be provided to the tree. This is what we today call town planning. That function of the Civil Authority allows people to live, work and trade together in an efficient environment.

Legislations for citizens

Again the question may be asked how far the government may go in this aspect of its task. Can a government, for example, legislate that homosexuals are not allowed in the defence force? It may be that because the presence of such people reduces morale etc., the defence force cannot do its task to the best of its ability. It is a point which may be debated.

The extent of legislation

Thirdly, the Civil Authority must guard against gross public infringement of God's Law, even when people are not (directly) affected. In the following outline we hope to deal with the separation between Church and State. Here we are to deal with those areas of the law that fall under the jurisdiction of the Civil Authority. What is the Reformed position regarding mining in national parks? Are robbery, abortion, drunkenness, and de facto relationships to be legislated against? And what about bike helmets, waste management, industrial relations?

Gross public infringement of God's Law

Since the Civil Authority is appointed by God, it is responsible to God for its actions. The question may be posed how the Civil Authority carries out its responsibility. It is by doing the three items enlarged upon above. A parallel may be drawn with Matthew 25: 31 – 46. In that passage Christ teaches His Church what it is to love the neighbour. Those who truly love their neighbour also love God and enter eternal life. How does the Civil Authority honour God? By doing its task. By legislating in accordance with God's will. By placing the neighbour (the citizen) before its own pleasure. By being responsible custodians of its territory.

The responsibility of the Civil Authority

We have already noted that the cultural mandate plays an important part in politics. However, it is not the task of the Civil Authority to fulfil this mandate. That mandate was given to man, to each individual. Hence also Paul tells Timothy to pray for the authorities that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."⁹ And when leading a godly life we are fulfilling the Cultural Mandate. The Civil Authority is to maintain order and to restrain the licentiousness of man. It is to govern, to regulate, not to do the work. Thus Dr. Veling points out the following five components of the Civil Authority's duty with respect to the cultural mandate. It should:

The Civil Authority and the Cultural Mandate

⁷Joshua 5:14, Luke 3:14

⁸Galatians 6:10

⁹1 Timothy 2:2b

18 CHAPTER 3. THE NATURE OF THE STATE AND ITS CIVIL AUTHORITY

1. **protect** people and organisations as well as the interaction that takes place between them in order to give them the possibility to fulfil the cultural mandate.¹⁰
2. **create an environment** that allows cultural activity to take place, doing this creation process when it exceeds the ability of individuals¹¹ or when the environment required is of such a nature that the Civil Authority cannot run the risk that they would not be fulfilled due to the negligence or incompetence of others.¹²
3. **coordinate** the activities of citizens and their organisations.¹³
4. **stimulate** cultural activity, with reference to man's duty to praise God.¹⁴
5. **conduct** cultural activity itself, when either negligence or a lack of ability on the part of the citizens and their organisations results in a cultural activity not taking place.¹⁵

To God's Glory

So where does that leave us? The State is a group of people in an area with some form of civil authority. This civil authority has a dual responsibility: to God and to its citizens; and a threefold mandate: to keep order, to restrain licentiousness, and to protect the Church and its ministry. And in everything, the Civil Authority, and the State as a whole, is to praise God. For we are to pray for the authorities because "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."¹⁶ All things shall work to God's glory.

¹⁰e.g.: economic policies that promote economic growth rather than a welfare state and judicial system

¹¹e.g.: provision of services such as a postal service and the building of roads

¹²e.g.: running of public schools and subsidies.

¹³e.g.: town planning, legislation regarding mining, agriculture, development, the environment.

¹⁴e.g.: through tax incentives, subsidies, and awareness programs.

¹⁵e.g.: cleaning up the environment. Negligence includes such things as land degradation, pollution; lack of ability includes situations where only the government is rich enough to fulfil the task at hand, e.g. mining in a third world nation.

¹⁶1 Timothy 2: 3, 4

Chapter 4

The Church and The State

Life consists of two aspects: the physical and the spiritual. Concerning the two, Calvin had the following to say: Calvin on the two Kingdoms

“Let us first consider that 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 (not improper terms) 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 — not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honourably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behaviour. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.”¹

In the last outline we concluded that the state could be constructed to be a creational ordinance. The same can be said about the Church. We confess that, “This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end.”² Yet, we don’t read about the church as such until after the Fall, namely “And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.”³ The first functioning state was set up by Cain, the first functioning church during the time of Enosh. Origin of the Church

Society in the majority consists of unbelievers. Thus, even from a practical point of view, to have the State ruling over the Church could spell disaster for the Church. For it would mean that unbelievers ruled the Church. On the Church and State are separate

¹Calvin, *J. Institutes of the Christian Religion* III xix. 15

²*Belgic Confession*, Article 27

³Genesis 4:26

other hand, Christianity cannot be constituted, so that the law of the land forces people to believe in God's Word. Indeed, Australia's constitution ensures freedom of religion. Hence no amount of force, which is the sword of the Civil Authority, can ensure that society as a whole is Christian.

The task of the Church

The Church recognises this fact. The task of the Church is to preach God's Word and to create an environment that is most favourable to the Gospel's reception. But because conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of man, force of coercion is not one of these methods. The Church must respect the freedom of the unbeliever to remain in condemnation.⁴ Likewise, the State must respect the freedom of the believer to worship God.

The duty of the Church regarding the State

The Church is a heavenly commonwealth,⁵ with Divine laws and a heavenly King. As a result, it is eternal, whereas the State is temporal. However, the Church has existence on earth and thus must live within the framework of the State. God gave the State authority to rule on earth⁶ and thus the Church is called upon to serve the State as a citizen in the manner that God has instructed it. The spreading of God's Word and the effective witnessing of believers is greatly advanced by the continuation of the Church. And for the Church to continue, it must remain separate from the State.

The duty of the State regarding the Church

Although the two are to remain separate, the State must also continue to exist — both for the Church and society in general. The State's task as preserver of law and order directly benefits the Church and its members. When the State carries out its task correctly, then the Church also has the freedom to carry out its task.

Rule of the State by Christ

"Christ rules His Church. And He also exercises universal power that we have seen comes to active expression. How then does He exercise rule over the State, especially if His body, the Church, is to remain in separation from the State?"⁷ The State in its various forms exercised control over all of humanity. It is also one of the instruments that the antichristian powers use in the war against the sovereignty of God. However, we also know that Christ has full control over the State. The antichristian powers cannot do anything He does not allow. Christ sets the limits for He has all authority.

Authority of the Church and the State

Different Doctrines

Throughout history there have been a number of different interpretations of the relationship between the Church and State. Even today the fine lines have not been drawn. It pays us to have a look at how different "Christians" viewed the relationship and determined according to Scriptural principles how the two stand over against each other.

Roman Catholics

The Roman Catholics recognise both the Church and the State as two distinctive kingdoms as well as the distinct roles played by each of them. But the Church is considered to be the greater kingdom and the State the lesser kingdom, because the former is eternal and the latter temporal. Thus the Church must also answer to God for the conduct of the State. Scriptural evidence for this is given by Matthew 16:19 where Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁴ *Canons of Dort*, I Article 15

⁵ *Philippians* 3:20

⁶ *Romans* 13

⁷ Zorn, R. O. *Church and Kingdom*, p. 181

With this gift, Peter also received the Church authority to rule over the State. Reference is also made to Luke 22:38⁸ where two swords are mentioned. The first sword is interpreted to be that wielded by the Church, the second that wielded by the State but received by the State from the Church. Thus the sword of the State is subject to the sword of the Church: the physical subject to the spiritual.

The Anabaptists⁹ believed that the world was the domain of Satan. Thus too, Satan was regarded as the ruler of this world. Believers were called to separate themselves from this evil system. Thus the Anabaptist accepted that they were to serve the State in general terms, but taught that the State had no real authority over believers. Likewise, the church had no authority over the unbelievers. Therefore, the Anabaptist separated themselves from the State and all that pertained to it; they did not vote, did not hold public office, nor joined the police force or the army (for their battle is spiritual). To them, there was no place for a Christian power in this world. Anabaptists

Calvin recognised that the authority of the State comes directly from God and not through the Church. The believer is a citizen of both kingdoms and under the authority of both Church and State. The State's authority over believers is limited to the power God has given the State and if the State acts outside its authority, the believers are to resist it. The State has the duty to assist the Church in Christianising the world. Calvin

Luther's ideas were very similar to Calvin's except that he "hesitated to impose Christian precepts upon an unbelieving world."¹⁰ Luther distinguished between the first kingdom (Church) by means of faith in divine revelation, and the second kingdom (State) by means of reason. Christians in government could invoke Christian principles in state affairs only as far as those Christian principles could be defended and justified by natural reason. Luther did not believe that Christians had the right to use the State to promote Christianity and to Christianise the world. Thus the State and its Civil Authority were to be neutral forces. Luther

The Reformed View

We as Reformed people hold a position that is neither truly Calvinistic nor truly Lutheran. The Lutheran concept is very attractive to the Reformed person. For example, Abraham Kuyper, who was at one stage the prime minister of the Netherlands, strove for a neutral state. Not "neutral" in the sense that it did not recognise God, for that would have been impossible. Rather, it would recognise God from His works in Creation. This same idea led to the heresy of Common Grace. Not Lutheran

On the other hand, Calvin goes too far. In his *Institutes* he says, "It [the Civil Authority]... also prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God's Name, blasphemies against His truth, and other public offences against religion arising and spreading among the people."¹¹ He also applied these words in Geneva when he too agreed to the fact that Servet should be executed for his heresies. Not Calvinistic

⁸ "So they said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough.'"

⁹ Today's Baptists are not necessarily anabaptistic in their reasoning

¹⁰ Eidsmoe, J. *God and Caesar*, p. 15

¹¹ Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV xx. 3

- The deleted words of Article 36 In 1905 a gravamen was issued with objections against a few words in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. These words were (in bold type) “Their task of restraining and sustaining is not limited to the public order but includes the protection of the Church and its ministry in order that **all idolatry and false worship may be removed and prevented, the kingdom of the antichrist may be destroyed.**” This was not suggested by Kuyper only, to whom such “blatant bias” would have been horrifying. No, professors from both the Doleantie and the Secession signed the gravamen. Thus it was not a Kuyperian change, but a reforming change.¹²
- The Civil Authority is not neutral What then do the Free Reformed people believe? Firstly, the Civil authority can never be neutral. It always founds itself on a set of norms. In the first outline we saw two basic political theories: revolutionary and anti-revolutionary. The first has humanism as its foundation, the second the recognition of God’s sovereignty. When a government makes up its laws, it does this on some principle. In most cases in a democracy, that principle is determined partly by the convictions of the party in government, and partly by the public opinion that exists concerning the issue. With Reformed politics, that principle would be solely derived from the Bible which reveals God’s will. Dr. K Veling describes what this would mean: “A Christian political party that seeks public support for a political program advocating that the Civil Authority is to follow God’s laws can count on opposition of a principal nature. The debate will be about the sovereignty of God and His Anointed. And as a result, faith will confront unbelief.”¹³
- The Civil Authority is not partial But secondly, the Civil Authority is not to be compared with the Old Testament Theocratic government that existed in Israel, which very thing Guido de Bres assumed.¹⁴ It is not the Civil Authority’s task to preach and spread the Word. Just as the Civil Authority does not fulfil the Cultural Mandate but is supposed to give man the ability to do so, so too the Civil Authority is not to spread the Word but allow the Church to continue its work of spreading the gospel. The Church will then ensure that all idolatry and false worship will be removed and prevented, and that the kingdom of the antichrist will be destroyed.
- The individual carries the ultimate responsibility The two worlds of the inner mind and outward behaviour are not, however, unattached. Both the inner mind (soul) and outward person (body) reside with the one person. This individual person, created with an individual will, has the final responsibility for his actions. When a person has been excommunicated or put in a maximum security prison, he can continue to sin. The Church and the State are then absolved from their responsibility. God will render to every man according to his works.
- Some examples It is time we turned to some concrete examples. It is, however, impossible to be comprehensive, for there are so many different areas of life where the spiritual merges with the physical. Take for example our schools. We have private schools run by associations whose membership is limited to Free Reformed people, and yet we accept government subsidies.
- Education The principle that underlies the interaction between the Church and the State depends on its purpose. The education process exists so that a young person may learn how to fulfill the Cultural Mandate in later life. This concept

¹²Faber, J. *Newsletter of ARCP and CPSA*, Nove 1990, p. 7

¹³Veling, K. *De Dienst van de Overheid*, p. 24

¹⁴Faber, J. *Newsletter of ARCP and CPSA*, Dec 1990, p. 7

exists both among believers and unbelievers. The unbelievers aim to better themselves for their own sakes; the believer aims to better himself for God's sake. To give the young covenant child the right perspective, he is taught at a Reformed School. But, because the Civil Authority has as its task to allow man to fulfil the Cultural Mandate, if it subsidises the public school, then the private schools are also to be subsidised. On the other hand, specific things that are taught to the covenant child are not within the jurisdiction of the Civil Authority. For example, catechism classes that prepare the covenant child for making Profession of Faith are outside their mandate. Thus catechism classes ought not to take place during school hours and should not be subsidised by the government.¹⁵

Another area that affects us is the area of legislation. Earlier, it was said that Calvin went overboard in stating that Civil Authority should legislate, for example, against idolatry. In the last outline it was stated that, "Thirdly, the Civil Authority must guard against gross public infringement of God's Law, even when people are not (directly) affected." It is that area that we now touch upon. The emphasis lies on the word "public". In our first quotation of Calvin, Calvin spoke about the two worlds of the inner mind and the outward behaviour. But, to use Dr. Veling's words, "It is very difficult with such sharp definitions [ie inner mind/outward behaviour] to set sharp criteria as guide rules for the Civil Authority."¹⁶ And yet he is willing to try, coming up with the rules noted in the last outline, of which the third is quoted above.

Legislation and God's Law

What is God's Law? It is against the second commandment to worship God in any other manner than the one He reveals to us. Does that mean the Civil Authority is to combat Islam, Roman Catholicism, the Baptists? No, for these are matters of the inner mind. However, think about the following example. It is required by the Koran that the Muslims are called to the Mosque on Fridays. This call is to be made from the minaret, the top of the Mosque. With the sophistication of today's technology (ie amplifiers), such calls are wide ranging. Everyone, and not only the Muslims, get to hear this call. This is an invasion of one's privacy, and against God's Law, for it is a public call to idolatry (even if the call is made in Arabic). Thus, the Civil Authority should not allow it. Likewise, church bells should not toll either (other than to tell the time). For their call to worship also constitutes an invasion of privacy. Invitations to worship services should be printed in selected media.¹⁷

Public infringement

God's Law then is the Ten Commandments. The first table deals with loving God, the second with loving one's neighbour.¹⁸ Thus, sins against the first table tend to be sins of the inner mind with respect to God, whereas sins against the second table tend to be sins of the outward behaviour with respect to one's neighbour. There will of course be overlap between the two tables. But in general, the Church concerns itself with the first table, the Civil Authority with the second. The separate spheres of authority are also reflected in the way each punishes infringement of God's commandments. The Civil Authority bears the sword and thus has the power to remove a person physically from the public.¹⁹ But the Church bears keys and thus has the power to remove a person

The sword and the keys

¹⁵GVPS, *Een vrije kerk/Een vrije staat*, p. 64

¹⁶Veling, K. *De Dienst van de Overheid*, p. 52

¹⁷GVPS, *Een vrije kerk/Een vrije staat*, p. 64

¹⁸*Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 93

¹⁹*Belgic Confession*, Article 36

spiritually from the communion of God's Church.²⁰

Thus, the Church concerns itself with man's direct relation to God, the State with man's indirect relation (via the Cultural Mandate) to God.

²⁰ *Heidelberg Catechism*, QA 82–85

Chapter 5

The Bible and Politics

We all accept the Bible as the basis for our lives. By it and through it we receive instruction in the principles of a Reformed life. At the same time, it also shows the direction in which believers will focus their time and energy.

Foundation of life

The relevance of the Bible to politics is misunderstood or ignored by many people. Yet, if we claim that the Bible is relevant in all spheres of life, surely politics is included! It appears that many of the difficulties which believers experience in a biblical political reflection spring from an underestimation of the active role of the Word of God. There seems to be a schism that cannot be bridged between the “ancient Bible” and the “complexity of contemporary politics.”¹

The Bible is relevant to politics

Care must be taken in which manner the Bible is applied to politics. Believers frequently look in the Scriptures for verses and passages that have direct bearing on political life. When such passages are put together, these believers claim to have come to a scriptural view about political life. From this it is obvious that a more refined application of the Bible to politics is required.

Applying the Bible

Authority began in paradise with the command to subdue the earth. Later, we find that Moses is judging the people of Israel: “When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another.”² On the advice of his father-in-law, he creates a group of judges and appoints able men to the hard work and “they judged the people at all times.”³ Later, at Sinai, God gave a multitude of laws relevant to the functioning of society and government so that ancient Jews were given secular laws which they had to obey on pain of penalty from the magistrate. Saul, the first King of Israel, is anointed by Samuel but does not obey God’s command. After him, faithful and indifferent kings dot Israel’s history. In Jesus’ time, there is oppression/occupation by a foreign power. Thus a variety of civil authorities are evident in the Bible.

Civil authorities in the Bible

Today civil authorities function differently from most of the systems experienced by Israel. People vote for a party or politician who represents their views. Once in parliament, the representatives will do their best to represent their “grass roots”. On what basis do we, as Reformed people, vote for a party or candidate? Can we agree with parties that do not approve of atheism, but do not promote Christianity either? Or may we only vote for Christian parties?

Civil authorities today

¹Goudzwaard, B. *A Christian political opinion*, p. 26

²Exodus 18:26

³Exodus 18:26

The Bible as textbook

The best text book is the Bible and the best teacher the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we read the ten commandments. By the hand of these, Prof Douma sketches in short what Reformed politics must strive to achieve.⁴ A discussion about the commandment “You shall not steal” in politics is different from that in the Church. In the last outline we spoke of public and non-public offences. Thus too, the Heidelberg Catechism (eg QA 110) will deal with both aspects.

Principle politics

But how does the Bible apply? Should non-Christian parties still govern according to Scriptural norms? H E Runner states that “in reality all political activity is principle.”⁵ It is based on some principle, either the sure Word of God or else an unreliable, imagined substitute. In an attempt to free humanity from religion, humanism rears its ugly head. The principle of the revolution, namely, the sovereignty of man, where man replaces the triune God, is often applied. Especially in politics.

Nevertheless, we must first know how the Bible should apply to the believer. Differing opinions about this abound.

The Mosaic Laws

Interpretation and application

Let’s, for example, take a look at the Mosaic laws. How should these be interpreted and applied? Three different roads can be followed.

1. We can apply them literally as they did to the Israelites.
2. We can eliminate from the Bible that which we do not like.
3. We can study the Mosaic law carefully and by comparing scripture with scripture come to a sound Reformed political perspective.

1. Literal Application

The literal application of the Old Testament laws is also known as Theonomy or Reconstructionism (ie reconstructing society to the old Jewish pattern). It is well worth our time studying this since it is quite prominent among orthodox Christians today, especially the Presbyterians (such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church). Theonomists come in minor variations but their principle aim is the same: to reconstruct society completely via a return to the law of God as given by Moses.⁶

Theonomy

Society, as the Theonomists envisage it, will mirror the religious attitude very clearly. Thus the political system associated with Theonomy is Theocracy. All the Mosaic laws are to be kept, the State is to have very limited and restricted influence, while free enterprise would be greatly stimulated and enhanced. Theonomists do not agree concerning the precise application of the Mosaic law: some will argue that the Kosher laws (those relating to cleanness and uncleanness) should apply while others disagree. But law enforcement will be an easier task: capital punishment will exist for 15 crimes and prisons will disappear since the principle of restitution will apply. Taxes will be reduced to a flat rate of 10%. Thus, society would lose much of the complexity it has today.

Theonomy and Reformed doctrine

As Reformed people we can identify with many of the issues that Theonomists stand for: they fight against abortion, for parental schools, and for law and order, to name a few. The return of God’s Word as a rule for our lives can therefore

⁴Douma, J. *Politieke verantwoordelijkheid*, pp. 164f

⁵Runner, H. E. *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*, p. 28

⁶*Reformed Perspective*, vol 8 No 7, p. 22

be seen as a positive element in Theonomic thinking. However, we must examine the motives and reasoning for adopting this form of government and society. Theonomists, just like conservative Reformed people, will say that Jesus is Lord of all life. Yet they will not agree that Jesus came to fulfil the law.⁷ True, the law as recorded in the Old Testament is still valid today. But the Theonomists take this literally. According to them, each of the commandments stated in it has to be kept. This brings with it the very real danger of substituting the works of the law for God's grace in Christ.⁸ Our Belgic Confession makes the following statement: "The ceremonies of the law have ceased... so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. In the meantime, we still use the testimonies taken from the law... to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel."⁹

The second interpretation was to eliminate from the law whatever clashes with our human understanding. For example, allowing birth control because we believe that otherwise the world might become overpopulated. But this is obviously an ungodly interpretation resulting in the denial of the infallibility of God's Word.

2. Eliminating

The third manner in which the law may be interpreted is to investigate the Scriptures, summarise the main teachings of a passage, and by comparing and combining summaries from other passages to obtain a Reformed political opinion. One example is Paul's advice to the Romans where he shows that God's law applies differently to authorities than to individuals.¹⁰ In the last five verses of chapter 12 Paul admonishes the individual Christians not to recompense evil for evil but to live peaceably with all men inasmuch as possible. But in the first seven verses of chapter 13 the ruler is called a terror to evil workers and an avenger to execute wrath upon evildoers.

3. Comparing Scripture with Scripture

With this type of interpretation, caution has to be exercised that a text or passage is not forced in to an interpretation that suits us at the time. To say that the law no longer applies because Paul writes "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"¹¹ is of course misquoting. In studying the Bible with political intention we have to be guided by the Holy Spirit, just as when we read it to know God.

Reading in context

The law itself can be considered to have a number of uses that refer to specific areas of life. Luther and Calvin both distinguished three uses for the law:

Uses of the Law

1. Social and political use: to constrain people to do good and punish evil.
2. Paedagogical use: the teaching aspect, where we are confronted with our sin and shown the perfect and holy standards of God.
3. Didactic use: describing the process by which God uses the law to teach believers to conform their lives to the will of God.

We are concerned with the social and political use of the law. The question that is now raised is: "Can the Bible be used as a handbook for governments?" The Bible can be characterised to play two roles in politics: that of source and

The Bible as source and norm

⁷Matthew 5:17-19

⁸*Reformed Perspective*, vol 8 No 7, p. 23

⁹*Belgic Confession*, Article 25

¹⁰Eidsmoe, J. *God & Caesar: Christian Faith and Political Action*, p. 7

¹¹2 Corinthians 3:6

that of norm. For a believer the Bible is by definition the source. It is the source of Living and Life-giving water.¹² The Bible will be a guide which we have to take up, and which testifies of itself that it is founded in our eternal God and not on the inconsistency of the human mind. Eidsmoe, when speaking of the law, says: “The Law of God is an eternal reflection of God’s absolute standards, a means by which we may know how God would have us live.”¹³ Reformed politics does not rest on our active reaching out to God’s Word, but on the active reaching out of God’s Word to us and the whole world.¹⁴ Runner agrees: “Christian political action can only be political action that is directed integrally by the hold that the Word of God, as one Word and one directing principle, has upon our hearts.”¹⁵

Dr. Veling

Dr. K Veling expresses it thus: “A political appeal based on the Bible is more than an expression of interest from a concerned group of believers.”¹⁶ However, he cautions that the Bible does not answer all the questions we would like to see answered. Neither are we to force a text into saying something we want. His conclusion is that listening to Scripture teaches us to approach questions from a specific direction and consider issues from a particular point of view.

Attitude to non-Christians

And what then of the non-Christian parties? Eventually, many of the laws and commandments given in the Bible will be recognised by humanists as relevant in some way. Thus, the ten commandments are sometimes adhered to. For example, even the socialist believes “you shall not kill”. But can we agree with Mouw who says that people must be “free to pursue the interests and projects that flow from their fundamental life commitments, however regrettable those choices may be from a Christian point of view” and “we are justified in promoting legislation only when it is aimed at a more equitable distribution of rights and opportunities”?¹⁷

Summary

In summary, the Bible will play a major role for the Reformed politician. It is the norm of his action and the source for his action. The law is a guide which we take up and which testifies of itself that it is founded in our eternal God and not in the inconsistency of the human mind. With the law as principle, we see that Reformed political life is a matter of principle. Since God’s Word is also sure, Reformed political action is full of hope and joy.¹⁸

¹²John 4

¹³Eidsmoe, J. *God & Caesar: Christian Faith and Political Action*, p. 7

¹⁴Goudzwaard, B. *A Christian political opinion*, p. 27

¹⁵Runner, H. E. *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*, p. 27

¹⁶Veling, K. *De dienst van de overheid*, p. 15

¹⁷Mouw, R. J. *Politics and the Biblical Drama*, p. 79

¹⁸Runner, H. E. *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*, p. 28

Chapter 6

Conducting Reformed Politics

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter declared: “let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”¹ Jesus had received all authority in heaven and on earth from His Father. He had become King of the earth, and He had become the earth’s saviour. The believer serves this Jesus: the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the believer is not only called to worship Jesus as his saviour, but also to serve Him who is King of kings. The believer is called to participate in the society God has set him. Jesus is King

Since politics concerns itself with the sphere of authority in a community, there are two positions any person can hold: that of subject and that of authority. Some Christians teach that believers are only called to be subjects, but Scripture shows us otherwise. Let us first then look at how a believer is to conduct himself as a subject and as authority. Subjects and authorities

Subject

In many places, Scripture teaches us to be obedient. One of the most encompassing passages can be found in 1 Peter 2:13–17: Reasons for being subject

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”

We see here reflected the fifth commandment: honour your father and mother. Hoeksema notes that God does not command “**Love** your father and mother”, but **honour**.² Paul points this out saying: “Children, obey your Fifth commandment

¹Acts 2:36

²Hoeksema, H. *The Triple Knowledge*, p. 285

parents in the Lord.” The civil authorities have been instituted by God. Thus in serving God we are called to obey the government.³

Civil authorities are sinful

But civil authorities are not perfect images of God. They too have been affected by sin, and as a result do not always act in accordance with God’s Word. So it was that once Peter was compelled to say to the Jewish authority, the Sanhedrin, “We ought to obey God rather than man.”⁴

The example of Daniel

God has also preserved for us the history of Daniel, one of the highest public servants throughout the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. In Daniel 6, the story of Daniel in the lion’s den is recorded. Daniel disobeys the law of the land: “whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.” Daniel responded by sticking to his custom and praying three times daily. He was punished in accordance with the law, yet afterwards he says: “I was found innocent before Him [God]; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.”⁵ S G de Graaf says: “The transgression of the king’s law was no longer an evil deed, for the law itself was evil.”⁶

Even submission after disobedience

Thus we must submit in due obedience to the civil authorities that are over us. We may disobey their commands when they are godless, but we are called to submit to the punishment. However, it is a last resort. For in the New Testament we hear the man who wrote: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” also declare: “I appeal to Caesar.”⁷

Conflicting commandments?

Nevertheless, we must “obey God rather than man”. Even if it means acting illegally, outside the boundaries of the law. For such a law, like Darius’, is not a righteous law. The Civil Authority “is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”⁸ Thus action in accordance with the first commandment does not constitute a transgression of the fifth. Dr. Douma says: “The very thing God is commanding him in that situation is not to obey.”⁹

Never disobey God

On the other hand, in disobeying the Civil Authority for the sake of obeying God we are to make sure that we do not end up disobeying God in another way. If a civil authority wants to force us to become Roman Catholics, we may not turn to iconoclasm — the wilful destruction of statues in Roman Catholic churches. That constitutes transgression of the eighth commandment.

Paul’s call for prayer

To conclude we take Paul’s words: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”¹⁰

Authority

The believer as authority

Man as the authority is one of the oldest institutions known. On the sixth day of Creation, God said to man: “Have dominion.”¹¹ Man was called to rule the earth as God ruled the universe. Despite the Fall, that call still stands. Man

³Respectively: Ephesians 6:1; 1 Peter 2:16 and Romans 13:5

⁴Acts 5:29

⁵Respectively: Daniel 6:7; 6:22

⁶de Graaf, S. G. *Promise and Deliverance*, p. 7

⁷Respectively: Romans 13:1; Acts 25:11

⁸Romans 13:4

⁹Douma, J. *Christian Morals and Ethics*, p. 80

¹⁰1 Timothy 2:1,2

¹¹Genesis 1:28

destroyed his capability to fulfil it; Christ restored it. As man and God, He became the Lord Jesus Christ. Because only the believer will serve the true master of the universe, it is only the true believer who can fulfil this command to God's glory.

When the believer stands in a position of authority, he is called to do what all men must do: govern. Again, we think of Daniel. By God's grace, he was governor at several courts. But Daniel did not pull all stops to convert those around him. His primary task as governor was to govern, not to preach. And thus, while going about his duties, Daniel witnessed of his God whenever the opportunity arose. He governed in such a way that "[the satraps] could find no charge or fault [regarding the kingdom], because he was faithful."¹²

The example of Daniel again

It is also only the believer who knows where the responsibility of governing authorities lies. He knows that he is not the servant of the people but a servant of God. His mandate is not to execute the people's will, but God's will. Hence, he will govern the people in accordance with the will of God. He will deny himself always, and, because he loves God and his neighbour, will work to do his neighbour's good. A believer cannot be said to be the truest representative of the people, for the people may be godless. But he is the best representative of what is good for the people and works to the honour of God. And we have seen in outline 2 that that is what counts.

Only the believer can exercise authority properly

The How of Participating in Politics

Reformed participation in politics is very much dependent upon the political system that exists in the community of which the believer is a member. In some countries, political parties are most effective, in others, some sort of lobby group. The process of politics may also determine how one acts. We will have a brief look at some of these.

Different political systems

One of the biggest issues in Reformed politics is whether the believer can work together with the unbeliever. Can we be members of groups such as Pro-life and People for a fair and open government? Can we be members of political parties that are not Reformed but allow a conscience vote? Can we be members of a political party with members of other churches? It is an issue that remains undecided within our circles.

Believers and unbelievers in the same association?

In Canada, there exist within our sister churches two organisations: The Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) and the Christian Heritage Party (CHP). The first is a kind of lobby group, comparable with our CPSA (Calvinistic Political and Social Association). The second mirrors the Reformed Churches, but CHP membership is open to anyone who agrees with the foundations of the Party. Rev Stam has queried: "The CHP is not a church gathering but a political party, and does membership of the CHP really entail more than a sympathetic-critical acceptance of its political program?"

Interchurch political parties: Canadian CHP

"Does the acknowledging of others as partners in a political organisation also mean receiving them as brothers and sisters in the church, or accepting the 'church' of which they happen to be members?"¹³

In the same Reformed Perspective, Rev Kampen has the following to say: "Let us be politically active in accordance with the ideals and high principles

The Church before the State

¹²Respectively; Daniel 4:27; Daniel 6:4

¹³*Reformed Perspective* vol 7 No 4, p. 3

as taught in the church. Reformed believers never put aside the church, nor their confession. Reformed confessors will never be ashamed of the church nor grow irate when the church is mentioned. How can we when the King of the world is first of all Head of the church?"¹⁴ The question centres on whether believers (true and false) can join forces under one banner because they have the same policy objectives. Especially in a country like Canada or Australia, it is numbers that get you somewhere in politics. Nevertheless, one is faced with the dilemma: can a true believer who works for God's glory work under the same banner with a possibly false believer who may work for his own benefit or the people's wishes without consideration for God?

Separate political parties: Dutch GPV

In Holland (as is also the intention of the ARCP), the political parties stand separately. Thus the GPV (Reformed Political Union) limits its membership to members of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). Other Christian parties that exist are the CDA, SCP and RPF. Generally, Holland is governed by a coalition government. Just as the Liberals and Nationals may form a government together, so in Holland parties with different foundations may work together to form the government. Another way in which the smaller Christian parties (GPV, SGP and RPF) work together is by sharing votes. In Holland, one needs say 500 votes to have a candidate elected to parliament. If the GPV wins 800 votes and the SGP 750, each will have one member in parliament. Then the leftover votes are pooled ($300 + 250 = 550$) and given say to the party which contributed the most. Thus the GPV has another candidate elected. Parties will also pool manpower in parliament and may even work out common policies. Nevertheless, because of confessional differences, the parties remain separated.

Yoked with unbelievers

Prof Douma compares this process with Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 7 to people married to unbelievers. In the political process we are married to unbelievers. However, we may not disassociate ourselves from them. When working in coalitions, he states the following three observations:

1. foundations of the coalition should not obstruct our Reformed principles,
2. responsibility for everything done by the group should not rest on each individual,
3. strength lies in numbers, hence there is a need for compromise.¹⁵

Compromise

Compromise is not, of course, done at the expense of party policy. Imagine the following situation:

E D A B C

We find ourselves in A but prefer C. Our partner is willing to go to B. Hence we will accept B, although we continue to strive for C. But if our partner prefers E, we will not compromise to D because D lies further from C than A.¹⁶ This is responsible government.

The intention of the ARCP

The ARCP intends to follow the lines of the Dutch GPV in a manner adapted to the Australian political system. In Western Australia, local politics

¹⁴*Reformed Perspective* vol 7 No 4, p. 19

¹⁵Douma, J. *Politieke Verantwoordelijkheid*, pp. 168–175

¹⁶Haasdijk, T. *Een Vaste Burcht*, p. 41

is conducted without parties. Thus a council comprises independents. The ARCP as such has nothing to do with local government, though it does offer to support candidates. At state and federal level, the ARCP intends to work together with other like minded parties. One such party is the One Australia Movement. But these things are still under consideration as the ARCP works towards a policy platform and registration.

Reformed Politics

Politics is about the theory and practice of Civil Authority. It was instituted by God to regulate life and restrain man's licentiousness so that God's name may be praised by everyone. Thus the Civil Authority protects its citizens, regulates the interaction of the people and guards against gross public infringement of God's Law. This can also be described as ensuring that the Cultural Mandate can be and is being fulfilled. The Civil Authority has been given the mandate to deal with an individual's public life. The Church concerns itself with an individual's relationship with God. For the Reformed person in politics, the word of God will be his source and norm, and his first sense of responsibility will be towards God. Since every Reformed person will somehow be involved in politics, be it as subject or as authority, it is necessary that Reformed people know what God has commanded and how to put it into practice.

Outline of Reformed politics

Thus many calls have come to us Reformed people to participate in politics. F G Oosterhoff said: "Meanwhile, let us get serious about our studies so that we know what is required in Christian politics, and work for the development of Christian political principles and policies appropriate for our situation in this country."¹⁷ After all, "the aim of Christian politics is not the comfort and well-being of Christians but the promotion of the Kingdom."¹⁸ SPYSC aims to study in such a sphere. It does not aim to be a lobby group such as the CPSA. Rather, SPYSC aims to lay the foundations for future members of the CPSA and ARCP, not only members in name but members who will work knowing what their task is. And it is not for the sake of the ARCP or the CPSA but for the sake of Christ and His coming kingdom.

The need for knowledge

The SPYSC logo (featured on the front of the booklet) is based on Psalm 60:4. The co-founder of the ARPA and CHP, ED Vanwoudenberg, once wrote: "The King James Version of Psalm 60:4 reads: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee that it may be displayed because of the truth." Here we have, in a nutshell, the description of the task God has given to each and every believer, which is to be applied by us to the many aspects of our lives, also as it concerns the political responsibility we have as participants in this society. We first of all give thanks to our God for the opportunity we have to do so. The unfurling of the Banner requires diligence, and to display it because of the Truth takes knowledge, knowledge in the first place of God's revealed Word, but also understanding of the issues we try to address. In Spurgeon's words: "Go ye forth in new times, with new resolves, and may you have constant renewings as new opportunities open before you."¹⁹

The call to participate

¹⁷ *Reformed Perspective*, vol 6 No 5, p. 8

¹⁸ *Reformed Perspective*, vol 6 No 5, p. 9

¹⁹ *Reformed Perspective*, vol 5 No 4, p. 15