

J. D. Dengerink: Critisch-Historisch Onderzoek naar de Sociologische Ontwikkeling van het Beginsel der "Souvereiniteit in eigen Kring" in de 19^e en 20^e Eeuw. Kampen: J. H. Kok. 1948. 285. Fl. 6.90

In November of last year I took a first step towards introducing to the readers of this journal the radically Christian philosophy of Professors H. Dooyeweerd and H. Th. Vollenhoven. I suggested at that time, and following the Dutch professors, that a radically Christian philosophy could appear only in Calvin's line, since he had broken far more radically than Luther with the medieval synthesis-philosophy, in which the power of the pure Word of God was polluted by themes that had emerged in Greco-Roman speculation. The tension in Luther between 'law' and 'gospel' but reflects that between 'nature' and 'grace' in the nominalistic scholasticism he had learned at the Occamist university of Erfurt; in later times this line in Lutheran thought would enable representatives of that tradition to accommodate themselves, consciously or unconsciously, to the modern humanistic theme of 'nature' and 'liberty'. Partly because of the universally acknowledged authority of Melancthon in the early period, partly because Germany, the land of Lutheranism, has also been the land of Wissenschaft ^{ΚΑΤ' ΕΞΟΧΗΝ} throughout the modern centuries, the Lutheran dualism has left its baneful mark upon Christian thinkers of other countries and of other schools.

The young men reared in the Calvinist tradition who today, sometimes in the face of an apathy or incapacity to act in their own circles, are strongly tempted to look in the direction of the seemingly more vital program of "neo-orthodoxy" will want to examine with scientific precision the challenge thrown down by Dooyeweerd that the irrationalistic conception of law to be found in Emil Brunner — Reinhold Niebuhr holds a similar view — is much more indebted to this synthesis-thought of Lutheranism than to the radically Christian thought of Calvin. It would be folly to gain a program and lose a principle.

Let no one minimize the ominousness of the fact that Reformed youth in many places is dissatisfied. It demands a program for the whole self, and there is nothing in American Calvinism to eclipse the glitter of "neo-orthodoxy". The only product on the market which can compete with it is the work of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, but until now no one has been able to render this epochal accomplishment accessible to English-speaking people. To learn the fundamental philosophical conflict between these two systems earnest Calvinists who can read even a little Dutch should attempt to read pages 477 to 493 of volume one of Dooyeweerd's De Wijsbegeerte der Wetidee and his article, "De Wetsbeschouwing in Brunners Boek 'Das Gebot und die Ordnungen'", in Antirevolutionaire Staatkunde (1935, pp. 334 ff.). From the former I translate one brief section.¹

When in the most recent past Emil Brunner again puts aside the scriptural view of law and feels compelled in accordance

¹Pp. 487 ff. The footnotes in the course of this translation are footnotes in Dooyeweerd's book.

with the modern Zeitgeist to pass off an irrationalistic ethics of love for a truly evangelical one,² when again he fulminates in the typically spiritualistic vein against the idea of Christian science, Christian statecraft, etc. etc., we see in that a new synthesis with the viewpoint of immanence-philosophy (that is, that of the modern irrationalistic Existenzphilosophie), a synthesis which is born not of Calvin's spirit but rather of the dualism of Luther, and which can have no fruitful future.

This is the after-effect of the Lutheran nominalistic dualism of 'nature' and 'grace', a dualism which Brunner does attempt to accommodate to Calvin's view of law, but which in reality is uncompromisingly opposed to it, just as it likewise comes into conflict with the Word of God. For the Word of God, which reveals to us the root of temporal existence and in that root the irreconcilable cleavage between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of darkness, drives with relentless earnestness to the 'either-or'!

If no Christian philosophic thought and no Christian view of law and the state, no Christian economy, no Christian art, etc. is possible, then these spheres of temporal life are withdrawn from the Christ; then the unscriptural dualism of 'nature' and 'grace' or of 'law' and 'gospel' must again be accepted; then, in order to bridge the dualism, we must take anew the way of synthesis and accommodation.

One may reject a synthesis with the rationalistic idea of law of Aristotle or of the Stoa, but a synthesis with modern humanistic irrationalism and criticism is not a speck more Christian!

In that case one comes once more with Brunner to the depreciation of certain aspects of meaning which go to make up reality. One comes with him to make an unscriptural absolute of the irrationalistically misconstrued commandment of love of Christian ethics at the expense of the idea of justice, which last Brunner, in consequence of his synthesis-standpoint, calmly abandons to be denatured to a 'merely formalvalue', a process it has undergone in the Neo-Kantian philosophy of law.³ One comes with him to the thesis, which denies the sufficiency of Christ's cross, that 'perfect justice' is a contradiction in terms, and that love, although it ought to have passed

²See Das Gebot und die Ordnungen (1932), pp. 108 ff. in connection with Brunner's article 'Das Einmalige und der Existenzcharakter' in Blätter f. deutsche Philosophie (1929). The commandment of love as 'Gebot der Stunde' or 'des Augenblicks' (the characteristic slogan of irrationalism!) is here set over against the law (grounded in the sovereign will of the Creator and laid down — H. E. R.) in the temporal order.

³See Das Gebot und die Ordnungen, p. 675, where it is said of the criticistic-Kantian view of the idea of justice that it 'erfahrungsgemäß und aus guten Gründen nur von solchen Juristen verstanden wird, die mit der reformatorischen Glaubens-tradition in Zusammenhang stehen' (e.g., Stammler and Burckhardt!) Thus the synthesis with the Kantian immanence-philosophy is consummated!

through 'formal justice', nevertheless abolishes justice!⁴

We hear from every side these days that Reformed theology must be corrected in the interest of Agape and to the disadvantage of justice. It is most important to get clear once for all the development in modern philosophical thought which lies at the root of this attempt of Brunner and Niebuhr, among others, to revise the Reformed theology. I know of no place in literature where that is made so clear as in Dooyeweerd's exposition of the dialectical tension in modern philosophy between the ideal of personality and the ideal of science. The former, which characterized the Renaissance, was accompanied by the urge to control nature. This called forth in time a picture of the world in terms of mathematics and natural science. In this world of classical science there was no longer room for the autonomous and free personality of the Renaissance. While the two themes are clearly seen wrestling with each other in the three Critiques of Kant, successors of Kant adopted the ideal of personality, requiring that νόμος (law) should issue from the *καὶ τὸς* (self), thus securing the complete autonomy *καὶ τὸς, νόμος* of the Self. Liberty, taken in this sense becomes therefore incompatible with external law, and it is such a motive which lies behind the reasoning of the dialectical theologians. The connection between justice and law is clear from the third footnote to Dooyeweerd cited above. The scriptural teaching of a many-sided cosmic law laid down in the very structure of the creation by the sovereign Creator is obviously an unacceptable *θεολογούμενον* to these men who force Christian thought to fit a basically unscriptural religious theme. Once this is clearly grasped much of the other talk about a mythological interpretation of Genesis 1-3, about the fall as a vertical relationship, and the erecting of the vertical relationship to God to the point of an absolute falls into the proper perspective. This fundamental departure from the time of Calvin,⁵ it must be understood, is not so much a question of exegesis as of philosophical and religious predilection, in this case a *μυθολογούμενον*. Let there be no mistaking that.

⁴See Das Gebot und die Ordnungen, p. 436: 'Gerade vom Christlichen Glauben aus gibt es keine irgendwie faszbare Idee der vollkommenen Gerechtigkeit. Denn Gerechtigkeit ist an sich unvollkommen'. I should like to point out that a justice 'an sich' does not exist at all, but is the result of the process of being made a meaning-less absolute, just as love 'an sich' is too! See further p. 437: 'Die Liebe ist konkret, persönlich, nichtvorausgewusst, nicht allgemein, nicht gesetzlich. Die Gerechtigkeit ist gerade allgemein gesetzlich, vorausgewusst, undersonlich-sachlich, abstrakt, rational'.

To this whole manner of reasoning there is but one fitting reply: it is not of Christ but of man. Let him coquette with it who will, but then he must yet learn to bow as a Christian before God's Majesty and Justice, since he has humanized the love of God in Christ.

⁵That the differences are fundamental can be seen from two pertinent passages in Calvin cited by Dooyeweerd (I, 486, note 1):

De aeterna praedestinatione (1552) C. R. 36, 361: "Non vero commentum illud recipio, Deum quia lege solutus sit quidquid agat reprehensione vacare. Deum enim ex legem qui facit, maxima eum gloriae suae parte spoliatur, quia rectitudinem eius ac iustitiam sepelit. Non

The above analysis I have thought proper to include here since the book I am reviewing, besides being a doctoral dissertation defended last year under Dooyeweerd, makes its own contribution to the above analysis by paying particular attention in its first chapter to those developments in post-Kantian thought which can be conveyed by the names Schelling and Historicism. This brief but clarifying section ought to be studied by all who are yet hazy on the matter I have brought up.

Dr. Dengerink's book is also especially welcome in that it affords us an insight into the radically Christian social theory being developed in the Netherlands. The principle of sphere-sovereignty is followed from the middle of the nineteenth century in F. J. Stahl and Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, the antirevolutionary Christian statesmen respectively of German Lutheranism and Dutch Calvinism, through Abraham Kuyper to its fruition in a conscious sociological theory in Dooyeweerd.

Dengerink quickly sketches in an introduction the development from the individualistic liberalism of nineteenth century social thought to the universalistic socialism of the twentieth. His concern is to show that these two forms of social theory, frequently regarded as the Either-Or, are not that at all, indeed that the Christian who would be Christian also in his sociological thinking can allow neither of them. The principle of sphere-sovereignty is the Christian solution which destroys the dilemma. According to this theory an analysis of society discloses a manifold of spheres, each having a character and law of its own. In the building of society men are not left to their own arbitrary desires, but are bound to constant internal structures which have their foundation in the Order of Creation as given by God, in the frame of which alone social relations have a real existence and the possibility of historical development. This conception of constant increased structures removes once and for all the spectre of historicism (historical relativism). These structures have the character of divine laws or statutes to which man is subjected in social life. Just because all communities (church, school, university, trade-union, economic enterprise, club, etc.) have their individual internal law, given them by God in Creation, and by virtue of this law they each have to fulfill their individual tasks, it is not possible that they be subordinated one to another, but only that they be co-ordinated with each other. Each has in its own sphere a sovereignty which is subject to no other authority than God.

Those who accept the principle of sphere-sovereignty as a rule for their sociological thinking reject sociological individualism because the different kinds of social relationship cannot be regarded as a social aggregate of individuals but have their own sense and are as such constitutive elements of human personality. They reject sociological universalism because they cannot look upon the relation between the different social structures as that of a whole and its parts. For, in order to fulfill its task within the whole in a right way, the part has to submit itself to the law of the whole. However, by virtue of the principle of sphere-sovereignty all social relations have their

5 continued) quod legi subiectus sit Deus, nisi quatenus ipse sibi lex est."

Comm. in Mosis libros V (1563) C. R. 52, 49, 131: "atque ideo legibus solutus est, quia ipse, sibi et omnibus, lex est". (Against the nominalistic exlex!).

own individual law.⁶

One can see the relevancy of such themes for us Christians in America today. We often hear the argument that business itself is now a matter of big corporations largely bureaucratic in structure, with the inference silently being drawn that the state might just as well take over in this field. However, as Dengerink remarks,⁷ we may not forget in this connection that even in such big businesses the economic viewpoint continues to play the leading role, and to it the entire apparatus of employees is subservient. That is essentially different from the apparatus of civil servants which is subservient to the function of the government as the maintainer of public order. State and business, our author argues, are subject each to its own law which issues from a Source above their own arbitrary wills. If we do not take these increased laws into consideration every struggle against the absolute or total State is already lost in principle. This observation of our author we ought to underscore, memorize and reflect upon every day we have life. What can we do to bring this truth to the attention of Americans?

This study is a critical-historical one, and one of its most valuable services is to point out the internal conflict in Stahl, Groen and Kuyper between those ideas of theirs which were formulated under the control of the scriptural doctrine of an increased cosmic order and other ideas which they inherited either from the historicistic idealism of the mid-nineteenth century (Volksgeist) or from the Thomistic dualism of 'nature' and 'grace'. This latter seems to have played a large role even in the thought of Kuyper, who, it is here asserted, divided the spheres of church and state not on the basis of the law of Creation but on the unbiblical dualistic religious motive of 'nature' and 'grace'.

The deeper cause for the ambiguous character of Kuyper's sociological thinking has to be found in his view of the Mediatorship of Christ as Saviour, which has a similar ambiguous character.⁸ Kuyper declares emphatically that Christ, as Mediator of Salvation, exercises full authority over all spheres of life. However, besides this truly biblical line of thought we find another which is not biblical at all and in which is felt the influence of the dualistic religious theme of 'nature' and 'grace'. Here, too, Kuyper upholds indeed the biblical view that Christ came to save the whole creation, but nevertheless he declares that the authority of Christ, Mediator of Salvation, is restricted to the inner life of man and to the church as institute, and that in the other spheres of life Christ does not rule as Mediator of Salvation but as Mediator in Creation. This causes him to distinguish between the sphere of "particular grace", which is concentrated in the inner personal life of those who really believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and in the Church, and the sphere of "common grace", which coincides with all other spheres of life and includes believers and unbelievers. "Particular grace" refers to eternal life and has a renewing and regenerating character; "common grace", on the contrary, refers to temporal life and has only a preserving character. The work of Christ as Saviour and Creator is restricted to the inner life of believers and to the Church. In

⁶In this summary I have followed the text of Dengerink almost literally, but not enough to use quotation marks.

⁷p. 258.

⁸This discussion is almost taken from the author's English summary

social life, outside the Church, believers and unbelievers have something in common. Therefore the light of Holy Scripture is not absolutely necessary to obtain knowledge of the rules of so-called "natural life". According to Kuyper we can refer to tradition, scientific thought and the concrete situation in human society for this knowledge as well. The Bible gives us only an affirmation and a surer basis for that which we know already "by nature". It is now comprehensible that, as Kuyper follows this second line of thought with regard to the sovereignty of Christ as Saviour, all sorts of unbiblical, humanistic motives have a chance to penetrate into his sociological thinking, influencing, e.g., his views as to the place of popular representation in society and as to the nature of the Constitution.

Much more could be said about the work. There is an extended discussion, finally, of the many phases of Dooyeweerd's thought as the culmination of the line Groen-Kuyper, a culmination in which unbiblical themes have been removed more thoroughly than heretofore. The chapter which discloses features similar to the Christian principle of sphere-sovereignty in the work of the Russian emigre sociologist Georges Gurvitch is useful for an introduction to contemporary sociological thinking.

One thing, however, remains to be said. It was pointed out that though Kuyper saw clearly the scriptural theme of sphere-sovereignty he was unconsciously compelled in working on details to fall back upon the centuries-old synthesis philosophy of Thomism. A general doctrine of reality inspired by Scripture was then still lacking. The work done since his time by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven meets that fundamental need. Surely we can find some way to make it available to English-speaking peoples. This does not mean that their work is near being perfect, but it is a great step forward. A famous historian once said that humanity should cherish its geniuses. The work of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven is the work of Christian genius and can prove a blessing to Christians all over the world. The time calls for action which has the chance to endure because it is in accordance with the Law of God.

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8 continued) appended to his dissertation. I judged it of sufficient interest to be included here.