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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: a third way of Christian social engagement

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SUMMARY

This article provides a brief introduction to three basic theological paradigms or heuristic devices of social engagement employed by evangelical Christians in secular society. First, two popular models are discussed: the Neo-Calvinist (Abraham Kuyper) and the Neo-Anabaptist (Stanley Hauerwas). The first is characterised by its extravert movement and the second by its introvert movement. The third paradigm, that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, will be proposed as a kind of *via media*. It is commonly described as an illuminating interpretation of Martin Luther's 'Two Kingdoms Theory' that is highly relevant for our secular and postmodern setting. Bonhoeffer's christocentric ethic of responsibility keeps the delicate balance between the unique role of the church and the role of the Christian disciple in a secular world. Bonhoeffer's approach gives sound theological grounding for an evangelical social ethic as it combines Christology and spirituality with social activism.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Artikel stellt kurz drei wichtige theologische Paradigmen bzw. heuristische Instrumente vor, die evangelikale Christen in ihrem sozialen Engagement in einer säkularen Gesellschaft anwenden. Zunächst werden zwei bekannte Modelle diskutiert: Das neocalvinistische (Abraham Kuyper) sowie das neo-anabaptistische (Stanley Hauerwas) Modell. Während das erstere eine extrovertierte Bewegungsrichtung hat, ist letzteres introvertiert. Das dritte Paradigma stammt von Dietrich Bonhoeffer und wird hier als *via media* vorgeschlagen. Es wird von Vielen als eine aufschlussreiche und für unsere säkulare und postmoderne Gesellschaft äußerst relevante Interpretation von Martin Luthers „Zwei-Reiche-Lehre» angesehen. Bonhoeffers christuszentrische Ethik der Verantwortung hält die Rolle der Kirche und die Rolle des einzelnen Christen in einer säkularen Gesellschaft im Gleichgewicht. Bonhoeffers Ansatz ist eine vielversprechende Grundlage für eine evangelikale Ethik, da er Christologie und Spiritualität mit sozialem Engagement verbindet.

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur présente une introduction aux trois paradigmes théologiques d'engagement social dans le monde séculier, autrement dit les outils heuristiques utilisés par des chrétiens évangéliques. A commencer par les plus populaires : le modèle néo-calviniste (Abraham Kuyper) et le modèle néo-anabaptiste (Stanley Hauerwas). Si le premier se caractérise par un mouvement extroverti, le deuxième est marqué par un mouvement introverti. En guise d'une sorte de voie médiane, un troisième paradigme est présenté, celui de Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Généralement présenté comme une interprétation éclairante de la théorie des deux royaumes de Martin Luther, ce modèle est d'une pertinence certaine pour nous dans un contexte sécularisé et postmoderne. Son éthique de responsabilité est christocentrique, elle maintient l'équilibre délicat entre le rôle unique de l'Eglise d'une part, et d'autre part le rôle du disciple chrétien dans le monde séculier. L'approche de Bonhoeffer constitue une solide base théologique pour une éthique sociale évangélique, puisqu'elle met en rapport la christologie, la spiritualité et l'action sociale.

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Introduction[1]

The Lausanne covenant expresses our common evangelical concern for the wellbeing of society:

> We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression.[2]

But how do we share God's concern for all people? Most European countries cherish a clear division between Church and state. Secularization is highly valued and religion is perceived mainly as a private matter. So, as we might expect, our Christian concerns are not always warmly welcomed in the public sphere. Nevertheless, many evangelical Christians are deeply involved in social issues and policy making. Living in the Brussels area I regularly meet fellow believers who are deeply involved in policy-making issues. As evangelicals, they are often in search of a sound biblical and theological foundation to support their public activities.

This article briefly introduces three basic theological paradigms or heuristic devices for a call to Christian social engagement in secular society.[3] It starts with contrasting two well known models: the Neo-Calvinist and the Neo-Anabaptist. Two representatives have been selected, respectively, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Stanley Hauerwas (*1940). Evangelical Christians are often stuck in the debate between these two opposing alternatives, the Reformed and the Anabaptist.[4] Therefore, a third approach will be proposed as a kind of *via media*. After dealing with the views of Kuyper and Hauerwas, the social ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) will be proposed as an illuminating interpretation of Luther's 'Two Kingdoms Theory' that is highly relevant for our secular and postmodern setting. Finally, this essay will show that Bonhoeffer's approach is inspiring for evangelicals as it combines Christology and spirituality with social activism.

1. The Neo-Calvinistic paradigm

Calvinism as a world view

Neo-Calvinism means Calvinism *after* modernity or *in response to* modernity.[5] It encompasses a worldview in which Calvinism serves as a cultural force in a pluralistic democratic society. Neo-Calvinism provides a full theocentric worldview that starts with a strong view on God's sovereignty. Every sphere of humanity's endeavour must have the Triune God as its sovereign Lord. Abraham Kuyper developed the idea of 'Sphere Sovereignty' to apply the claims of the sovereign Christ to every sphere of life, be it family, Church, state, education, philosophy, art, science or theology. We recognise this in the famous quote from his inaugural lecture at the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam (1880):

> No single piece of our mental world is to be sealed off from the rest and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'[6]

For Kuyper, Calvinism was much more than a denomination or group of denominations. It is an all-encompassing world-and-life view which enables us to understand and make sense of reality.[7] According to Neo-Calvinism, all Christians are called in their professional lives to restore, transform and redeem the natural, spiritual, cultural and social realms of God's creation; to bear upon society, to influence and change it, redeeming and claiming it for Christ to whom the whole created order belongs. This divine sovereignty is reflected in a three-fold human sovereignty, namely in the state, in society and in the Church. This sphere-sovereignty of creation order became an important building block in the development of a broad Christian worldview which enabled Christians to take earnest responsibility for their different roles in society. Kuyper tried to do justice to the rich and multifaceted fabric of human existence under the sovereignty of God. This Reformed paradigm gives Christians directions to be wise stewards of society while preventing ecclesiastical authorities from dictating public policy. Kuyper also stressed the need to keep the government in its proper sphere:

> The State may never become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life. It must occupy its own place, on its own root, among all the other trees of the forest, and thus it has to honour and maintain every form of life which grows independently in its own sacred autonomy.[8]

Antithesis and common grace

To explain the ambivalent relationship between Christians and society, Kuyper used two seemingly contradicting doctrines: antithesis and common grace. According to Kuyper, there exists a basic

antithesis between the Kingdom of God and the world. The redeemed live out of one principle – love for God, and all other people live out of the opposite principle, namely rebellion against God. In Western culture, these are two ways of life between which we have to choose. There is the naturalistic and humanistic principle of modernity *and* there is Christianity based on God's revelation. In the case of science, the conflict is not between faith and science as such. According to Kuyper all science presupposes some kind of faith. The true conflict is between two fundamentally different assertions of the cosmos: the Normalists and the Abnormalists. The first group perceives the cosmos as being normal as it evolves spontaneously from its structural potentials to its ideal. The second group sees the present cosmos as abnormal, disturbed by the Fall to such an extent that only a regenerating power can warrant the final attainment of its goal. Ultimately, there are two kinds of human consciousness: that of the regenerated and of the unregenerated.[9] This doctrine has a deep impact on all our views on issues in work and society. The gap between these two perceptions of reality is profoundly deep and fundamental in its nature.

Nevertheless, the gap, deep as it is, can be bridged. There is an important point of contact between believers and unbelievers. This bridge is not made by diminishing the effects of sin on humanity. That would be semi-Pelagian and thus uncharacteristic of the Calvinist heritage. Again, Kuyper's proposal is entirely theocentric. The antithesis can only be solved by God himself. So, Kuyper developed his famous doctrine of common grace.[10] It is the idea that in addition to special or saving grace, which is given only to God's elect, there is also a grace that God bestows on all humans. Whereas special grace regenerates people's hearts, common grace restrains the destructive process of sin within humankind in general and enables them to develop the latent possibilities of creation. Through common grace, every person can make a positive contribution to the fulfilment of the cultural mandate as given to humanity before the Fall. Civilization, development and progress should not be ascribed to Satan but seen as proceeding from God. There is a continuous development of the human race with as its supreme end the glory of God. Believers and unbelievers share the gift of common grace. Natural persons are unable to do any spiritual good, but they are nevertheless able to perform civic righteousness. Both groups of people are joint co-workers with God as well as instruments of God.[11] In this sense it is evident how Kuyper could praise the Enlightenment as it brought about the collapse of the ancient regime and gave birth to social democracy. Yet its antireligious stress on human autonomy as a substitute for God's sovereignty was held to be deplorable.

Modernistic paradigm

Neo-Calvinism was developed in the context of modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as an alternative to Hegelian monistic idealism and the dominant evolutionary materialism. Inevitably, it made use of modern forms of argumentation in its critical assessment of culture. It is characterised by the search for a comprehensive worldview with strong rational components based on God's revelation. At its centre is the insight that all created life bears in itself a law for its existence, instituted by God himself. God has set clear boundaries which science can discover. In that sense Neo-Calvinism is still speaking in terms similar to the meta-narratives of modernity. In the attempt to update Calvinism some traditional modern concepts were embraced, as Peter Heslam rightfully observes,

> In fact, however, this programme borrowed liberally from the systems it purported to oppose – from pantheism the idea of coherence unity, from evolutionism the idea of human and religious progress.[12]

Today, the antithetical approach and the claim to have a clear insight in the creational order have an antagonistic ring to them. Postmodern thinkers react with some allergy to all forms of authoritative truth claims and foundationalism. We live not only in a post-Christian but even in a post-secular context. Postmodernity asserts that we are not the masters of the world that surrounds us. There is no such thing as 'the creational order' that we could impose on people from other traditions and sets of beliefs. The Neo-Calvinistic model still has the flavour of 'Christendom', an ideal most people have abandoned a long time ago. There were religious convictions amalgamated with political power where the wickedness of humankind is demonstrated at its very best. In a postmodern mindset Neo-Calvinism might be suspected of being inclined to play a power game using institutional structures to influence society.

We can learn a lot from Kuyper but we have to be aware that the challenges have changed

immensely since his time. This doesn't imply that Neo-Calvinism has become totally obsolete under the pressure of postmodern relativism. Interesting attempts are being made to make Neo-Calvinism more relevant in a postmodern context.[13] In some respects, for instance in its epistemology and its denunciation of the presumed neutrality of naturalism, it was way ahead its time. It deconstructed the myth of unbiased science long before postmodernity. Finally, Kuyper was always suspicious about an overly powerful Church because his views were rooted in personal piety.

2. The Neo-Anabaptist paradigm[14]

Constantinianism

In contrast to the more Calvinistic branch of evangelicalism, a growing number of theologians are denying the justification, the feasibility or even the desirability of a Christian state.[15] This pacifist Anabaptist stream is very much alive and seems to fit well with the postmodern mindset. Stanley Hauerwas, a theological ethicist, is an important spokesperson of this Anabaptist paradigm.[16] For Hauerwas, as a theologian of the Radical Reformation, the Neo-Calvinistic approach is too much a *Constantinian synthesis* or a type of *constructive Protestantism*.[17] *Constantinianism* is Hauerwas's shorthand for accommodation to the world and giving in to the seduction of power.[18] Hauerwas claims that up to the present time, especially in the United States, when the relationship between Church and state is considered, the Constantinian mindset still holds Christian thinking captive. This is true of liberal as well as conservative Protestantism. Both think that the church's business is to use the state's means of power, especially through legislation and law enforcement for the improvement of society, regardless of how such a good is to be achieved.

It is exactly this basic assumption, often taken for granted, that Hauerwas tries to prove faulty. One of his books carries the poignant and programmatic title *After Christendom? How the church is to behave if freedom, justice, and a Christian nation are bad ideas* (1991). Hauerwas defies the arrogance of modernism which claims that we can create our own stories. We do not construct our own stories or our own ethics; we are always shaped in and by the context of community. Hauerwas embraces the postmodern critique of the Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre that confidence in the possibility an objective universal ethic is slowly dying. MacIntyre argues that the contemporary ethical discourse is constituted of fragments from various historical contexts which no longer exist. He opts for virtue ethics to enable human beings to come to their purpose (*telos*). But virtues have to be embedded in specific historical and narrative structures.[19] Hauerwas follows MacIntyre in rooting character formation in a specific narrative of a historic community. In the case of Christianity, our story is a part of God's story. We are not called to be 'moral' but to be faithful to the story which says that we are creatures under the Lordship of God.[20]

Church ethics

According to Hauerwas, we must not focus primarily on the world but on the Church. His ethics is an ecclesial ethics. Let the Church simply be church. Not as an establishment in either legal or cultural form, but as a community of those who are faithful to the story of Jesus Christ. In this way the Church becomes an alternative community that carries out the story of God and participates in a kingdom established in and through Jesus of Nazareth. The Church is an alternative political body opposed to the kingdoms of this world. In opposition to any individualistic ethic, or to any sort of natural ethic based on general human nature or any minimalist liberal ethics, Hauerwas takes the community of believers as the one starting point and focus of all Christian ethics. Christian ethics is Church ethics, not some generally accepted universal philosophical ethic with a broad view on justice. One of the best known quotes from Hauerwas is his dictum that 'the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic'. This highlights the call for the Church to embody the Christian story and in doing so becoming the visible alternative to the ways of the world. The Church has to train its people to become Christians displaying virtues and character, and to live up to its unique narrative; to be the community of the cross, the people of God's 'peaceable Kingdom'; to reject any use of violence, thereby risking its very security; to set its hope on the providence of its gracious God. The church *in* and *in contrast to* this world. In order to become acceptable and influential in public life, the Church would have to level its unique and radical demands on people's lives.

A typical misunderstanding is to qualify this model as 'sectarian'.[21] Hauerwas does propose a critical and partial participation in society. The gospel doesn't contain a social theory or a pref-

erence for some type of governmental structure but it requests that we act in concrete situations. Hauerwas' focus is primarily on the integrity of the Church. The Church's life of discipleship, of displaying a Christ-like character, is not simply self-serving, allowing Christians to live a good life and to feel good about it. Hauerwas' social ethics can be called subversive instead of universal. But in its response it provides a positive programme of character formation through communal practices.[22] Hauerwas constantly thinks of the 'effect' that the Church has on society. So, somewhat paradoxically, while on the one hand criticizing 'liberal' Christianity for diluting the unique Christian message by trying to be accepted and effective in a public that does not share Christian commitments, in his own way Hauerwas constantly has an eye for the impact and relevance of the Church in society as the counter-cultural society, the alternative polis, the body politic that practices politics in a way compatible with and shaped by the way of the Messiah. Hauerwas does not propose a sort of disengagement from the world. Quite the contrary, it seems that practically everything the Church does has social and political consequences.

The way the Church impacts society is not by trying to change it through involvement in the structures of liberal society on its inherent terms, but by witnessing to society about a truly alternative life by means of the Church's members. In doing so the Church helps the world to see that it is the world that is falling short of the intended good, virtuous, peaceful and truthful life exhibited among and by God's people. It is imperative that the Church engage the world on its own terms, not on the terms of the world, that is, liberal, Enlightenment, democratic, pluralist terms. The church's politics is of a different kind than the politics of liberal society. Hauerwas fears that the price Christians are paying for getting a hearing in liberal society is too high; instead of exercising a genuinely Christian influence on society, what happens is that the Church is being compromised in the process by having to deny exactly what makes Christian social ethics 'Christian'.

Dualistic paradigm

The Neo-Anabaptist paradigm reasons from a dualistic split between Church and society. There seems to be a lack of searching for common ground between these two realities. Therefore the interaction is mainly seen in terms of conflict, albeit in a pacifistic form. This turns the Neo-Anabaptist paradigm into a mainly introvert model. Fruitful interaction between the Christian faith and our democratic political culture would require a more positive appreciation of Christian public involvement.[23] One important cause of Hauerwas' conflictual paradigm is his unnuanced and dogmatic view on the sin of the Constantinian turn.[24] But Lesslie Newbigin asks the correct question:

> It is easy to point – as monks and hermits, prophets and reformers in all ensuing centuries have continued to point – to the glaring contradiction between the Jesus of the Gospels and his followers occupying the seats of power and wealth. And yet we have to ask, would God's purpose as it is revealed in Scripture have been better served if the church had refused all political responsibility, if there had never been a 'Christian' Europe, if all the churches for the past two thousand years had lived as tolerated or persecuted minorities like the Armenians, the Assyrians, and the Copts? It is difficult to think so.[25]

So, a more dialectic and theologically nuanced perspective on public life is much needed.

3. Bonhoeffer's christocentric responsibility ethics

The third paradigm: Bonhoeffer's view on the Two Kingdoms

Neo-Calvinism brings a lot to the table for Christians active in the public domain. Its theocentric approach to modern society is very appealing. But as a paradigm it is indebted to a traditional view of the possibility of a Christian nation[26] and to modernistic optimism. Neo-Anabaptism draws us back to the central theme of the Christian community as an alternative *polis* but it tends to reduce Christian ethics to a story of and for the Church only. The first model is characterised by an extravert appeal to all Christians to fulfil their God-given roles in society, whereas the second model of ecclesial ethics entails an introvert move to the community of the faithful. Kuyper provides us with a modern interpretation of the Reformed view of Church and society in relationship, whereas Hauerwas offers a postmodern interpretation of the Anabaptist view. The third well known paradigm for the relation between Church and society (state) is Luther's 'two kingdoms model'. According to Luther, there are two realms of existence, one for the Christian

and one for the non-Christian, while the Christian lives in both realms simultaneously. The one at his right hand is the realm of grace and gospel and the other, at his left hand, is ruled by the sword and the law. What is essential is that God rules in both spheres – but in different ways. This is not a form of dualism since good and evil can be found in the two realms.[27]

Bonhoeffer basically follows the Lutheran model but gives his own creative interpretation of it. He mainly reacted to the German Christians[28] who misinterpreted the Lutheran model in a dualistic sense, as if one were dealing with two different realities, one with and one without Christ. According to Bonhoeffer, the monk and the cultural Protestant of the nineteenth century share the error that there are two separate spheres, the sacred and the profane, as if we could exist in only one of these. On the contrary, there is only one reality and that is 'God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world'.[29]

Christocentrism

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's christocentric approach is very appealing to an evangelical social ethic which takes the gospel as its central message. Through his christological ethics Bonhoeffer provides a theological grounding for an introvert as well as an extravert dimension of Christian social engagement. Christian ethics is concerned with the community. But the particularity of the divine mandate of the Church is to proclaim the lordship of Christ over the whole world.[30] Hauerwas appreciates Bonhoeffer's focus on the visibility of the Church as a suffering community of disciples over against a Constantinian state Church.[31]

In *Discipleship* Bonhoeffer gives us a Christ-centred spirituality that incorporates the insights of his earlier writings on Church, faith and community life into the practical area of Christian life. Christian discipleship is the response par excellence to systemic evil in society. Jesus suffered and was rejected by the world. His passion was a passion without worldly honour and this sums up the message of the cross. This 'must of suffering and rejection' has now become the badge of true discipleship.[32] Only through the intense experience of suffering can we understand the meaning of the cross. What Bonhoeffer has in common with Hauerwas' paradigm is the idea that the Church as body is first of all a suffering Church, rejected and persecuted for the sake of the gospel.

Yet the meaning of Christ goes much deeper than simply some form of *imitatio Christi*. Bonhoeffer's ethics is fully Christocentric even as it deals with the world of the secular. In the Christology of Chalcedon the two natures of Christ, his divinity and humanity, are one and yet differentiated.[33] The central event on which our ethics should be based is: 'In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world.'[34] This divine event has changed dramatically our perception of reality as a whole. In Christ all things exist (Colossians 1:17). We are now in Christ invited to participate in this actual reality (*Christuswirklichkeit*). Reality is the world as accepted by God in Jesus Christ. There is no dualism between world and Church since in Christ there is only one realm in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united:

> In Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, the one not without the other. The reality of God is disclosed only as it places me completely into the reality of the world.[35]

This christocentrism implies a refutation of the autonomy of reason and the independent lawfulness of the secular world (Eigengesetzlichkeit). Christ is the true source and centre of all reason, justice and culture. 'To Christ everything must return; only under Christ's protection can it live.'[36] The only relationship we have to the world is through Jesus Christ. Our involvement in society is not primarily grounded on some theology of creation, natural law, reason or universal human rights.[37]

The christocentric approach tempers the expectation we have for our role in society. Jesus was hardly involved in solving worldly problems.

> His word is not an answer to human questions and problems, but the divine answer to the divine question addressed to human beings. The word is essentially not from below but from above.[38]

We are not there to bring solutions (*Lösung*) for all the problems of the world but to bring redemption (*Erlösung*).[39]

However, this does not discharge us from our calling. Our relationship to the world is one of responsibility for the world in both word and deed. The essence of Christ's personhood is 'being-there-for others' (Dasein-für-andere), so are we called to be present in this world. The Church is only church when it is there for others.[40] This brings us to the important christological concept of deputyship (*Stellvertretung*) or vicarious representative

action. Christ lived and died vicariously, and so his disciples are called to vicarious actions out of responsible love.[41] Through Christ's representative actions, a new reality has been created which has now become the life principle of all Christians.

But let us not be overly idealistic. We cannot solve all the problems since there are social, political and economic systems that hinder faith in Jesus Christ and destroy the essence of human beings. Nonetheless we are called to overcome these problems. 'Everything the church has to say regarding the orders of the world can only have the effect of preparing the way.'[42] We should be interested in worldly questions and ask ourselves 'Who is Christ for us today?'

Involvement and creational order

According to Bonhoeffer, there is a dual task for the Church as it deals with secular problems.[43] The first one is to draw a negative boundary through proclaiming the word of God. The Church has to declare guilty those structures that hinder the faith. The second task is a positive contribution, not so much based on the word of God but on the authority of responsible counsel by Christian experts. Distinguishing those two tasks is characteristic for the Lutheran model. It protects the radical character of the word proclamation and differentiates it from the merely human counsel given by Christian experts. In this context Bonhoeffer quotes Luther: 'Teaching is heavenly, life is earthly' (*doctrina est coelum, vita est terra*). The one belongs to the teaching office (Amt), the second to the diaconate or the role of the lay people. The latter are the counsellors for worldly affairs, who have to discover the divine laws within economy and state.

With some hesitation Bonhoeffer speaks of a 'relative autonomy',[44] and there is a striking similarity with Kuyper's doctrine of sovereign spheres.[45] However, Bonhoeffer was critical about 'orders of creation' as separate realities. This idea was often used by German Christians to justify the love for blood, race and German soil. Instead he preferred to speak of 'orders of preservation' (*Erhaltungsordnungen*). This broken world is redeemed by Christ and preserved by the Father until its final consummation. Bonhoeffer's view on nature was entirely christocentric: 'The natural is that which, after the fall, is directed toward the coming of Jesus Christ. The unnatural is that which, after the fall, closes itself off from the coming of Christ.'[46]

Secularised world

The reality of Christ leads us to the reality of the world today. As Bonhoeffer wrote in one of his prison letters:

> I am continuously driven by the question what Christianity or who Christ is for us today. The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious words, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience – and that means the time of religion in general.[47]

Bonhoeffer had a very clear view on the process of secularization. 'God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science, has been surmounted and abolished…'[48] He does not believe there is any valid method for changing the situation and he is critical of the results of some apologetic attempts. These are pointless; the world has simply come of age (*die mündig gewordene Welt*). There is the 'promising godlessness' of the world come of age which arose as a protest against the religiously disguised godlessness of the façade of Christianity. There is no longer room for pseudo-religiosity and metaphysical systems. Humanity is drawn back upon itself, freed from false traditional religious practice. Humanity has stepped out of false solutions, been deprived of the opium of religion and therefore humanity is now open for a true conversion to the reality of God. Living in this secular world is the way of the cross.[49]

> On the cross God lets himself be pushed out of the world. God is powerless and weak in the world and precisely as such is he with us and helps us.[50]

Through *mortificatio* comes *vivicatio*. In this pain we can experience God's nearness. As Ulrik Nissen rightfully observers, 'The secular is not atheological.' The theology of the cross provides the prophetic motive of demonstrating Christ in a secular world as well as the basis for deep piety and Christian mysticism.

But there is another reason why Bonhoeffer speaks positively about secularization.[51] Mankind has liberated itself and is able to stand against ideological powers and false religion. Bonhoeffer was disappointed in the German church as it had failed to confront Nazism powerfully. However, he had met courageous people outside the church who were prepared to take a stand and to struggle for righteousness and truth.

Church and *disciplina arcani*

Bonhoeffer's call to be a disciple publicly is counterbalanced by the hidden dimension of discipleship. As has been noted before, in Bonhoeffer's theology the cross and humiliation of Christ play a central role. Christ did not wield his divine powers before an unbelieving world. There is no room for triumphalism. We as Christians have to act in simple and humble obedience to our Lord, whose divinity was hidden before the wise and powerful of this world. Our existence is not a glorious demonstration of moral superiority but in the shadow of the Cross of Christ.

Bonhoeffer shows his deep aversion against aristocratic Christianity or a triumphal Christianity. In two letters he refers to the ancient tradition of the 'discipline of the secret' (*disciplina arcani*).[52] This was a practice of the early church to protect itself against corruption from the world. Bonhoeffer tries to integrate a rigid spirituality with an involvement in a secular hostile society. Christian ethics should not be imposed upon an unwilling people. This 'cavalier way' is the approach of organised religion, using institutional structures and laws. We rather have to protect the mysteries of faith from religious profanation. Christians should meet each other in all honesty and secrecy for prayer and worship. This is the Finkenwalde Seminary model of intense community of the like-minded. It is the opposite of the more outgoing seeker sensitive mega churches which we find in the United States and which are exported to Europe.[53] The combination of prayer and action for justice is the most distinctive contribution of Bonhoeffer's spirituality.[54] It is only by this combination that Christians are able to overcome systemic immorality.

4. Conclusions

Evangelical Christians need not be stuck in the polarity between the extravert Neo-Calvinist and the introvert Neo-Anabaptist model. At face value, both approaches seem to be in opposition, but as I have demonstrated, they agree in their aim to impact the world, albeit in radically different ways. We recognise that for Kuyper the Church has to stay Church and should not turn into some political force. Kuyper would agree that a deep spiritual life is crucial to fulfil our calling in the world.[55] The similarities between Hauerwas and Bonhoeffer are also evident. Both stand for a Church living as a community of disciples in a secular world. They both emphasize peacemaking and truth telling as core virtues for Christians in contemporary society.

The Lutheran model, as it is interpreted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, provides an interesting *via media* integrating pietism with a prophetic calling in the world. It has no modernistic triumphalism; it is a theology of the cross. Bonhoeffer's christocentric ethic of responsibility has many attractive features as we confront the challenges of postmodern times. The Church is a community of faith that on the one hand shuns the power of politics and on the other hand has a clear critical voice opposing systemic structures of power. Hauerwas' paradigm is helpful in letting the Church be truly Church and the world truly world. Christian spirituality does not end up in a ghetto of the Church but has a clear calling in this world. It is not 'the cavalier way' but rooted in discipleship and a readiness to suffer and to be rejected. When Christian mysticism becomes Christian activism we are bridging the gap between Church and secular society. A gap that is unreal, since there is only one reality in Christ our Lord.

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Notes

1 This article is based on a lecture given at the conference of The International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE) in April 2009. Cf. Patrick Nullens, 'Theological paradigms for bridging the gap' forthcoming in A. de Muynck and J.H. Hegeman (eds.), *Bridging the Gap* (Sioux Centre: Dordt Press, 2011).

2 http://www.lausanne.org/covenant

3 Well known are H. Richard Niebuhr's five approaches in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). Using Niebuhr's models this article deals with 'Christ the transformer of culture'; a soft and less sectarian form of 'Christ against Culture' and 'Christ and culture in paradox'. For a brief evangelical reflection on the five paradigms see Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing the Good* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 189-215. See also Donald A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

4 See for instance the Abraham Kuyper Lecture at Princeton by Richard J. Mouw (March 29, 2007) on 'Culture, Church, and Civil Society: Kuyper for a New Century' published in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28.1 (2007). Ulrik B. Nissen observes the same dichotomy. He refers to Bonhoeffer and John Milbank for a better theological appreciation

of secular society; see 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethics of Plentitude' in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26.1 (2006) 98.

5 Scholars distinguish Calvin*ism*, a development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the Reformer John Calvin. Calvinism is 'pluriform in terms of its theological roots, since Calvin never occupied the same dominant position for the Reformed tradition as Luther did for the Lutherans (hence the term 'Calvinism' is itself misleading).' Under the influence of Abraham Kuyper, 'Calvinism also came to be associated with a so-called theological world-view and therefore came to denote a much wider range of concerns than those represented by the strictly theological interests of Reformed confessionalism.' See Carl R. Trueman, 'Calvinism' in Trevor A. Hart (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 103.

6 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 488.

7 Fuller developed in the Reformed philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd (1889-1977) and Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978).

8 http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kuyper/lecture.pdf or *Lectures on Calvinism The Stone Lectures of 1898* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008) 96, 97.

9 Corresponding to the once-born and twice born of William James; see A. Kuyper, *Calvinism, Six Stone Lectures* (1898), the fourth lecture on 'Calvinism and Science'.

10 This was not an entirely new idea; it is well rooted in Calvin's work but Kuyper expanded it and made it more prominent. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) in his lectures *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847) maintained that the intellectual revolution of the Enlightenment had subverted the spiritual foundation of European society.

11 Kuyper uses this terminology as he describes the progressive work of common grace; see *Gemeene Gratie* vol. II [1903] (Kampen: Kok, 4th ed. n.d.) 606.

12 Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview, Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) gives a penetrating analysis of these modernistic elements in Kuyper's thinking.

13 For example, Guenther Haas interacts critically with postmodern virtue ethics in 'Kuyper's Legacy for Christian Ethics' in *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998) 320-349. For an interaction with the dominant role of social philosophy in postmodernism, see M. Elaine Botha, 'Prospects for a Christian Social Philosophy in a Shrinking World' in Luis E. Lugo (ed.), *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life. Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 221-240.

14 The term Neo-Anabaptism is not widely used. It refers to theologians who have sympathies with the more Anabaptist branch of the Reformation but are reinterpreting it and are not so much ecclesiologically connected to this tradition. Stanley Hauerwas is a key figure. John Howard Yoder was a Mennonite and had a strong influence on Hauerwas. Other names in this tradition are Nancey Murphy, Samuel Wells, Glen Stassen and James McClendon.

15 Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 13, denounces the nationalistic 'idolatry' of American evangelicalism which often fuses the cross and the flag. 'Because the myth that America is a Christian nation has led many to associate America with Christ'.

16 Currently Stanley Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University (Durham, North Carolina).

17 Stanley Hauerwas, 'A Christian Critique of Christian America (1986)' in *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2001) 459-480.

18 Following his master teacher, John Howard Yoder, whose *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) has become a classic statement of Anabaptist, Biblically grounded, social ethics.

19 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

20 S. Hauerwas, *A Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983) 68.

21 See Hauerwas' response to James Gustafson's allegation of sectarianism: S. Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today. Essays on Church, World, and Living In Between* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001) 3-9.

22 Samuel Wells and Ben Quash, *Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 190.

23 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

24 In this respect Hauerwas is drawing heavily on Yoder.

25 Leslie Newbiginn, *Foolishness to the Greeks. The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 101.

26 By the notion of a 'Christian nation' Kuyper never expected a nation of converted Christians, but a nation that identifies itself with Christianity as its main heritage and mindset. It is the special effect of special grace on the outworking of common grace. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 198-199.

27 Based on Luther's treatise *On Temporal Authority.* Original title: *Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig ist* (1523).

28 The 'Deutsche Christen' were a Nazistic lobby group within the German Protestant Church which became very strong due to the government-sponsored efforts to nazify the Church. This led to a schism with the *Bekennende Kirche* in which Bonhoeffer was heavily involved.

29 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 57-58.

30 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 399.

31 Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004) 43. Hauerwas provides an eclectic reading of Bonhoeffer as a pacifist, turning him into an ally of Yoder. He joins the many coups of misappropriation committed on Bonhoeffer, but at least this book demonstrates the significant overlap between the two paradigms.

32 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 84-91.

33 His Christology was expounded in the lectures he gave at Berlin University in 1933, which have been handed down through the notes of students. Christ is the centre of human existence, history and nature. Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978). For the christological concentration of Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics see Andreaz Pangritz, 'Who is Jesus Christ for us, today?' in John W. de Gurchy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 134-153.

34 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 55.

35 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 55.

36 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 341.

37 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 356.

38 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 354.

39 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 354. Bonhoeffer criticises the Anglo-Saxon approach which implies that Christians have the solutions to worldly problems, such that one only needs to listen to these answers to solve the problems in our world. This refers for instance to Methodist 'campaigns' or 'crusades' to combat worldly evil. In general it refers to the implementation of government power to serve Christian ethical standards. This critique can also be applied to the Neo-Calvinist paradigm.

40 Larry Rasmussen, 'The ethics of responsible action' in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 206-225.

41 The full meaning of *Stellvertretung* is hard to translate. It is an essential aspect of Bonhoeffer's social ethics; see Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: a theology of sociality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 56-58; Hans Daub, *Die Stellvertretung Jesu Christi ein Aspekt des Gott-Mensch-Verhältnisses bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Berlin: Münster, 2004).

42 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 360.

43 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 361-362.

44 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 361-362. Unfortunately the manuscript ends abruptly with three words for an outline: 'reason – law of what is created – of what exists'.

45 G. Huntemann, *The Other Bonhoeffer. An Evangelical Reassessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 80-81.

46 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 173.

47 D. Bonhoeffer [16 July, 1944], *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 326

48 D. Bonhoeffer [30 April, 1944], *Letters*, 279.

49 Ulrik B. Nissen observes the same dichotomy, see 'Ethics of Plentitude', 107.

50 *Prison Letters*, quoted and translated by Ulrik B. Nissen, 'Ethics of Plentitude', 107.

51 This is a very complex theme. Huntemann rightfully describes Bonhoeffer's theology as multidimensional and processual. The coming of age stands in tension with the powerlessness of God and the mystery of the cross. We experience Christ in this God-forsaken modern world. Huntemann, *The Other Bonhoeffer*, 82.

52 For a brief exposition of Bonhoeffer's 'discipline of the secret' see Geoffrey B. Kelly, 'Prayer and action for justice: Bonhoeffer's spirituality', in *The Cambridge Companion*, 250-252.

53 'If our worship simply mimics the disciplinary practices and goals of a consumer culture, we will not be formed otherwise. Conceiving of the church as a disciplinary society aimed at forming human beings to reflect the image of Christ, we will offer an alternative society to the hollow formations of late-modern culture': James K. Smith, *Who's afraid of postmodernism?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 107.

54 As is observed by Kelly, 'Prayer', 252.

55 W. van 't Spijker, 'Spiritualiteit bij Kuyper', *Wapenveld* 56.4 (2006) 32-38.