

Christian Reformed Political Thought

The Question of Religious Freedom from Christian Reformed Perspective

Emad Thabet

E-mail: e.a.m.thabet@vu.nl

I. Introduction

This paper discusses the theme of religious freedom in relation to Christian Reformed political thought. The question that I will try to answer is how the Christian Reformed thought accounts for the function of religious belief in politics and for justice and freedom of religion for all citizens at the same time. To answer this question, I will point out two basic notions for the Christian Reformed thought: the ‘principle of sphere sovereignty’ and ‘differentiation’. By the principle of sphere sovereignty I mean that human society ought to be structurally plural according to a given creational law. Each societal institution has its intrinsic norm that makes it sovereign in its own sphere. By differentiation I mean that throughout historical development human beings do actualize those given norms in the created order, by which differentiated human institutions with differentiated tasks come into existence. The significance of these two notions is that the state ought not to be an all-embracing institution. Rather, the state and religious institutions are differentiated societal institutions among others. Each is sovereign in its own sphere according to given laws in the created order. In order to introduce these two notions, I will start with discussing the Christian worldview, which suggests an integral unity of the created order between the ‘natural world’ and the ‘religious totality’ of human life. Then, a philosophical elaboration on this worldview is offered. This elaboration concerns the philosophical background of the principles of sphere sovereignty and differentiation. After that, I will introduce Christian theories of society and state, investigating their recognition of differentiated societal communities with differentiated tasks in human society. I will also discuss to the norm of public justice as the leading function of the state and its significance for guaranteeing political justice and religious freedom for the various societal communities. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

II. Christian Reformed Worldview

Christian reformed worldview suggests an integral unity of the created order, in the sense that there is no radical separation between the ‘natural (created) world’ and the ‘religious totality’ of human life. According to the Dutch protestant philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), the scriptures do not teach a contrast between the nature of God’s creation and redemption in Christ Jesus. Rather, they exclusively teach the radical and uncompromising antithesis of sin and redemption. This worldview can be explained as follows: God created humankind after His image, giving him the mandate to subdue the earth under the total rule of the kingdom of God. In the heart of humankind, the religious center of its being, God concentrated all of creation toward His service. In this human heart, God laid the supra-temporal root of all temporal creatures. In that sense, human heart transcends all temporal things in the service of God. The whole religious meaning of God’s creation, therefore, lies in the human heart, the supra-temporal center of human existence, and of God’s creation. In Adam, therefore, not only all humankind fell, but also all the temporal cosmos of which humankind was the crowned head. In Christ Jesus, the head of the second covenant, God gave the New Root of His redeemed creation, in which the new humanity was implanted through surrender of the heart, the center of existence.¹ This is what Christian thought means by the short formula: Creation-Fall-Redemption as the Biblical ground-motive in viewing reality in a wide scope.²

Central to the Christian worldview is that God is the ultimate sovereign of the creation and the absolute lawgiver. All temporal societal communities, including political institutions, are rooted and grounded in its divine structure given in the creation under the kingdom of God.³ The kingdom of God, the central religious claim of Christ Jesus, means to renew the human heart, and to submit the entire human life to the full rule of God.⁴ This fact of the kingdom of God

¹ H. Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State*, in *The Collected Works, Vol. 2*, D. F. M. Strauss, ed., (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 123-124, see also H. Hart, *Calvinism as a Cosmoscope*; in *Confessing Christ in Doing Politics*, van der Walt & Rita Swanepoel, ed., (Potchefstroom University, 1995), 1-10. Also, Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism and Politics*; Stone Lectures, at Princeton University, 1898, available at: http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper_lecturescalvinism.html. On addition to his opposition to the French revolution, he emphasizes that states belongs to the common grace of God to human race after the fall into sin.

² For more about the Christian worldview see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for Reformational Worldview*, Grand Rapids, Michigan & Cambridge, U.K. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), second edition.

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State*, 128.

directly opposes the self-willed, rational, or total state, since kingdom of God means God's sovereignty over human life in its entirety. Politics, therefore, is never neutral. It is directed to one direction or another, whether to the kingdom of God or to the realm of darkness.⁵ This is why Dooyeweerd criticizes all kinds of synthesis, which attempt to accommodate the religious unity of creation concentrated in the human heart under the total rule of God to the nature-grace scheme of scholastic philosophy, by which state was placed in the realm of nature by Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle's assumption.⁶ Dooyeweerd, too, uncovers the synthesis of the nature-freedom scheme of modernity, which assumes constructing the societal communities from their 'simplest mathematical component': the abstracted individuals, abandoning God given laws for the state in the created order.⁷

There is, however, a question that must be addressed: does this Christian thinking mean that Christians should attempt to change the world in the here and now, transforming it to the kingdom of God through politics? The answer is that Christians ought not to withdraw from politics nor attempt to bring about the kingdom of God in the full sense in the here and now through politics. Yet, in confidence that God will bring all things to completion and fulfillment through Christ Jesus, they may contribute in political discussions as well as in all other aspects of human life, viewing that there is no radical discontinuity between our labor in this world and the next. Therefore, their contribution will be one among others under an open heaven, seeking peace and prosperity in human life.⁸ Based on this worldview, a philosophical elaboration can be developed.

III. Philosophical Elaboration on the Christian Worldview

Crucial to Dooyeweerd's philosophy is that the theoretical thought is never autonomous. It is always bounded to a certain ultimate understanding of human life. The starting-point of Dooyeweerd's philosophy, therefore, is the conviction that God is the lawgiver and the ultimate sovereign of the created order, including human life. In his philosophy, the conditions of human

⁵James William Skillen, *The Development of Calvinistic Political Theory in the Netherlands, with Special Reference to the Thought of Herman Dooyeweerd*, PhD. dissertation, Department of Political Science at Duke University, (1974), 428.

⁶Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State*, 124-126.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-138

⁸Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: Grand Rapids* (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 158-177, see also Skillen, Christian action and the Coming of God's Kingdom, in *Confessing Christ in Doing politics*, 47-60

knowledge in concrete experience are the same as the conditions of the created reality itself. They are to be found in the law framework of the created order under the sovereignty of God. At the same time, the creational law framework is to be discovered through a direct human experience with the created reality. This approach indicates that Dooyeweerd's philosophy is based on a transcendental-empirical method, in the sense that this philosophy accounts for the transcendental given laws in creation. These transcendental laws can be only discovered through direct experience with reality. In his ontological philosophy, Dooyeweerd distinguishes two fundamental kinds of structures in the created reality. One is the modal cosmic order. The other is the individuality-structures. The earlier is concerned with the ways of being or with *how* things exist, whereas the latter is concerned with *what* exist or with the identity of a particular kind of things. Both, the modal aspects and the individuality-structures, are the law-side of reality, which govern human action.

III.1 The Theory of Modal Cosmic Order

Dooyeweerd distinguishes fifteen modal aspects (ways of being) of the given creational law. This given creational law, for him, is the transcendental condition of knowing reality and of reality itself. The cosmic modal aspects are the numerical, spatial, kinematic, physical, biotic, psychical, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical, and pistical. Each modal aspect has a characteristic moment or meaning kernel that makes it a distinguished modal aspect. The meaning kernel of these modal aspects are discrete quantity, continuous extension, movement, energy, life, feeling, analytical distinction, free formation, meaning, interaction, frugality, harmony, retribution, love, and certitude, respectively.⁹

The modal aspects stand in a successive order, in the sense that there are earlier and later aspects. The later aspects presuppose the earlier ones. Besides, all the modal aspects have an irreducible character. However, emphasizing the irreducible character of each modal aspect does not mean that there are fragmented law-spheres in the created reality. There are cross-connections between the modal aspects through analogies, for modal aspects are always functioning together in coherence and do not appear alone. Two kinds of analogies between the

⁹ R.van Woudenberg, Theories of modes of being (modalities); in *Reader II, Philosophical Foundation II*, (Free University Amsterdam, 2007-2008). a, 7,8

modal aspects are at work. These analogies are retrocipation and anticipation. In case of retrocipation, the later aspects refer back to the earlier ones. The numerical qualities in a triangle for example, such as the length of its sides and the size of its angles are the retrocipations in the spatial to the numerical. The numerical is used here in a certain sense: a spatial one.¹⁰ Hence, the numerical assumes the character of the spatial aspect. Moreover, it appears that there is an order between the aspects: the spatial presupposes the numerical. However, the numerical does not refer back to another aspect. Therefore, it comes at the very start of the modal aspects. In case of anticipation, the earlier aspects refer to the later aspects. When we say, for example, logical economy, the economic aspect is present in the logical aspect in the norm of frugality in thinking. In doing science, we prefer a theory which explains phenomena in the simplest way.¹¹ This is an anticipation to frugality: the meaning kernel of the economic aspect. However, the pistical aspect does not contain anticipations of later aspects, for it is related to the concentration of our temporal horizon. Therefore, it comes at the very end of the order of the modal aspects.¹²

The modal aspects from the analytical to the pistical are God's given normative laws for human cultural mandate throughout the historical development. Human beings, therefore, have a subject function in these modal aspects, in the sense that human beings in their freedom can obey or disobey those normative laws. However, disobeying the given norms is not without damage in human life. These modal aspects, therefore, require human recognition. This recognition includes positivisation of a normative principle by making the proper legislations according to that normative framework.¹³ The principle of justice as a normative principle, for example, is recognized, but the legislations by which the norm of justice is applied in different historical situations are subject to different positivisations. The development of penal law, for instance, demonstrates that the legislations of capital punishment are being abounded as we became aware of the integrity of human body. The normative principle of justice is indeed invariant, but its historical positivisation is a subject to changing according to the complexity of the historical situation. The normative principle and its positivisation are applicable to the post-historical aspects: lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, ethical, and faith. The reason is that in these modal aspects there is a historical retrocipation with its element of the free formation.

¹⁰ R. van Woudenberg, *Gelovend denken*. Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn (Kampen: Kok.1992), 77, cited in G.J. Spijker, *State, Nation and Integration*, Mphil thesis, VU University Amsterdam, 2005, 19, 20.

¹¹ Ibid.,

¹² R. Van Woudenberg, *Theories of modes of being (modalities)*, 30.

¹³ Ibid., 14, 15.

One can point out the basic characteristics of the theory of cosmic modal aspects as follows:

- 1- The starting-point of this philosophy of reality is the conviction that God is the ultimate sovereign of the universe, including human life.
- 2- The theory introduces the modal aspects as the creational law-framework, by which knowing of reality as it really exists would be possible.
- 3- The theory is concerned with the irreducible character of the modal aspects. Each modal aspect is sovereign in its own sphere.
- 4- The theory points out the cross-connection between the meaning kernels of the modal aspects through retrocipation and anticipation.
- 5- There is a normative character starting from the analytical aspect up to the pistical, which can be positivised, and that requires human recognition.

III.2 The Theory of Individuality-Structures

The proper approach to speak of individuality-structures is to clarify the relationship between the modal aspects and the individuality-structure. The relationship between them is an expressive one, in the sense that the characteristic moment of the modal aspects are expressed all together in coherence in an individuality-structure. An individuality-structure obtains its identity from the meaning kernel of the leading modal aspect of the interconnected aspects in that individuality-structure. This leading aspect is called 'leading function' or 'qualifying function'. It determines the intrinsic purpose of a particular kind of entities. The leading or qualifying function, therefore, specifies a particular kind of entities from other kinds. What specifies a tree from a stone, for example, is the biotic aspect of the tree. The biotic aspect is the leading or qualifying function of the tree.

In reality, of course, individuality-structures can be closely related to each other. What kind of relationship then can be between different kinds of individuality-structures? Dooyeweerd sharply distinguishes the so-called 'encaptic' relationship of different individuality-structures from 'part-whole' relationship. The former occur when there is an intimate link between two

individuality structures having distinct structural principles. This intertwining can be very close, but will not change the internal nature of both structures. Individuality-structures that function within encaptic interlacings always have their own independent internal ‘qualifying function’ and their own internal structural principles.¹⁴ These structures are never parts of a larger whole. But, they remain “relatively independent totalities.”¹⁵ The part-whole relation can occur “only between entities of which one, according to its nature as a whole, determines the inner nature of its parts.”¹⁶

One can point out the basic characteristics of the theory of individuality-structures as follows:

- 1- The enduring identity of an individuality-structure is derived from the expressive relationship between the modal aspects and that individuality-structure.
- 2- The leading or qualifying function of an individuality-structure relates the leading modal aspect of that individuality-structure with all other aspects that are functioning all together in coherence. The leading or qualifying function determines the intrinsic purpose of that individuality-structure.
- 3- The relationship between individuality-structures is not a part-whole relationship, rather it is a whole-whole relationship. The crucial difference between these two kinds of relations is that the latter maintains the irreducible character of an individuality-structure.

How does this ontological philosophy determine a Christian view of society? This question I will now elaborate.

IV. Christian Theory of Society

According to Clouser, a Christian Reformed thinker, the term ‘society’ refers to three basic relationships: individual to group, group to group and individual to individual. The term

¹⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd, *The New Critique*, Vol. 3, 637.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 634.

¹⁶ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions*. La Jolla, (The Herman Dooyeweerd Foundation, 1986), 66, (first print in 1962).

‘community’ only includes the first two basic social relations. The societal communities are divided into two major divisions: institutional and non-institutional. The institutional communities do have the following characteristics: 1) their members are united to an intensive degree, 2) members have the intention of being life-long members, and 3) membership, at least partly, is independent from the member’s will; for instance, family, marriage, state, and religious communities: church or mosque. By contrast, the non-institutional communities are those in which the member’s bond is less intense and less permanent. The membership is not intended to be life-long, and members are free to come and go; for example, businesses, hospitals, labor unions, political parties, and schools.¹⁷ Societal communities are to be distinguished also into ‘natural’ and ‘historical’ communities. The former is not founded by the free formation of humans, like family and marriage, whereas the latter have come into existence by human cultural activity. Throughout their historical development human beings form new differentiated societal communities. Therefore, all social communities, except family and marriage, have a historical ‘founding function’.¹⁸ A societal community also, whether institutional or non-institutional, natural or historical, has a ‘leading or qualifying function’, which determines its intrinsic purpose, and by which it obtains its irreducible nature and determines its intrinsic purpose as an individuality-structure.

The relation between societal structures is not a part-whole relationship. Rather it is a whole-whole relation, according to which every societal structure is determined by its internal structural principle according to the creational law. This assumption directly leads us to a structurally pluralistic view of reality, which in turn leads us to reject any hierarchical view of reality. Every societal structure has its own particular law-sphere enjoying a distinguished ‘sphere sovereignty’. The diversified societal communities can be related to the various aspects of the cosmic law, by which social communities can practice their sphere sovereignty. According to Clouser, school is related to the logical aspect,¹⁹ marriage to ethical, club to the social, church to the faith, and state to the justicial.²⁰ Social communities, however, are not separated islands. The relation between them is to be explained as enkaptic relationships: whole-whole

¹⁷ Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An essay on the hidden role of religious belief in theories*, Notre Dame, (University of Notre Dame press, 2005), 228,229.

¹⁸ Clouser, (2005). According to Dooyeweerd, family and marriage have also ‘founding function’, but not historical. It is a biotic founding function’.

¹⁹ Some other reformed authors view that the qualifying function of school in the historical aspect as it has formative function.

²⁰ Clouser, 258.

relationship. The state and school, for example, can be enkaptically related when school have to fulfill a particular standard that is required by the state. This relation, however, would not change the genuine responsibility of both, the state and school.

The idea of the state is not in principle different from all other societal communities. According to this viewpoint, the state is one societal community among others having its own internal structural principles.

V. Structural Principles of the State

Dooyeweerd discusses the structure of the state in relation to the question of the relation between might 'power' and right 'law'. He opposes the immanence humanistic political philosophy, which was not able to grasp the proper relation between 'power' and 'law'. For him, the reason behind the problematic dialectic of power and law is the fact that these two crucial functions of the state have been theoretically abstracted from the unified individuality- structure of the state. As a result, the internal structural principles of the state have been ignored. This very situation brought about a crisis in political theory. The political theory has reached a stage to be almost without an idea of the state.²¹ Dooyeweerd's remedy for this crisis is directed to the investigation of the internal structural principles of the state as such, as individuality-structure, encompassing different aspects. He therefore seeks to solve the dialectic of power and law by placing them in a unified individuality-structure of the state. He attributes 'power' to the historical/founding function and 'law' to the leading function of the state. The former refers to the institutional historical formation of the state that inherited the use of power in undifferentiated societies, and it is related to the historical aspect of the law-side of reality. Whereas 'law' refers to 'public justice' as the leading function of the state and is related to the juridical aspect of the law-side of reality. Hence, the state is a public jural community of rulers and subjects, which has been established on the historical foundation of the monopolistic organization of the power of the sword over a given territory. It is also to be indicated here that Dooyeweerd, following the lines of Augustine, Calvin, and Kuyper, is of the opinion that the power of the sword is a result of sin. That does not imply that the state is a fallen institution, but rather it belongs to the common grace

²¹ Skillen (1974), 400

to establish public justice over a given territory. It is also to be mentioned that both, historical and jural aspects, are normative aspects, and hence the state is a normative institution.²² Dooyeweerd, therefore, solves the problem of might and right, not simply by an attempt to find out a mid-point between them, but by analyzing the internal structural principles of the state as such.

The question that has now to be addressed is: if the leading function of the state is ‘public justice’, then, what does ‘public justice’ mean? The principle of sphere sovereignty is crucial to understand the meaning of public justice. It gives the foundation that the state does not embrace the other societal communities or relationships. Yet, it functions as public legal community for harmonizing the diverse legitimate legal interests of individuals and the legal sphere sovereignty of the various societal communities. For Dooyeweerd, this harmonizing process should consist of weighting all the interests against each other in the retributive sense, based on the recognition of sphere sovereignty of those societal communities.²³ According to this assumption, public justice is proper to the state as an individuality-structure qualified by the legal aspect. Public justice is then the just interrelating of all legal interests, which rise from the legal sphere sovereignty of the societal communities within the territory of the state. At the same time, the private justice within a particular societal community requires harmonizing the interests arising within that community.²⁴ Dooyeweerd employs the term ‘harmonizing’ in this respect for a systematic consistency, because the legal aspect is immediately ‘founded on’ the aesthetic aspect in his arrangement of modal aspects, in which harmony is the meaning kernel of the aesthetic aspect. However, the economic foundation of the legal aspect illuminates more clearly what Dooyeweerd has in mind. Public justice is to be understood in terms of non-excessive balance of the legal interests. The state, therefore, ought to prevent the excessive satisfaction of each of these interests on the expenses of the others. In other words, public justice implies an equitable treatment of the juridical interests. The concept of equity is an indispensable one in Dooyeweerd’s political theory. It applies principally in what Dooyeweerd terms ‘the civil-law sphere’ of the state, which regulates the inter-individual and inter-communities relationships

²² Ibid., 400-416

²³ H. Dooyeweerd, *The New Critique*, III, 454-456

²⁴ Jonathan Chaplin, *The Meaning of Public Justice*; in *Philosophia Reformata*, 72 (2007), 130-133

because of the legal principles of equality and freedom.²⁵

Dooyeweerd also draws a distinction between the enduring structure and the variable task of the state. The structure determines what the state performs in concrete situations according to socio-historical circumstances. The principle of public justice that is derived from the state's structural principles is indeed universally valid, but its 'positive contents' depend upon an intricate complex of variable socio-cultural conditions.²⁶

My discussion aims to point out that Christian Reformed political thinking, according to its ontological presuppositions, accounts for two crucial notions. The first one is the principle of 'sphere sovereignty', according to which each societal community ought to be sovereign in its own sphere according to given norms in the created reality, having competency of making its own laws. The source of this sovereignty is the strict relation between the societal communities as individuality-structures and the given cosmic law of the created reality. The relationship between the sovereign societal communities is not a part-whole relation, but a whole-whole relation. The state, therefore, is not an all-embracing community. Rather, it is a societal community among others. The state is qualified by its leading juridical aspect, oriented by the norm of public justice in what it performs in the society.

The second is 'differentiation', according to which all societal communities that have come into being by human cultural activity throughout history actualize the given cultural norms in the creation order. Therefore, these differentiated communities have their own distinctive nature and their own differentiated tasks in human society.

According to these two notions, the state and the religious institutions (whether Christian or Islamic) are differentiated societal communities. Each has its own nature, task in the human society and sovereign in its own sphere according to its internal laws. The very attempt (whether by the state or the religious institutions) to dominate the other is of an undifferentiated nature. Moreover, extending the moral discourse of one societal community over other communities violates the internal laws of 'sphere sovereignty' of the other societal communities. How can this assumption be of help towards a just and free society?

²⁵ Ibid., 134. See also, http://www.lgmarshall.org/Reformed/kuyper_lecturescalvinism.html

²⁶ Ibid., 138-139

VI. 5 Christian Reformed Politics and the Question of Justice and Religious Freedom

Christian Reformed politics, as viewed by Dooyeweerd, provides us with a foundation for a just and free society. It aims to place each societal community in its proper place in society, sovereign in its own sphere. The state is not an all-embracing institution. It is limited to its legal function according to its internal principles structures. Religious institutions too, whether Christian or Islamic, are limited to their own structural principles, handling the questions of faith. The problem occurs when undifferentiation dominates the relationship between religious belief and politics, by which religious communities make use of political means to peruse their goals. At the same time, the state can make use of religious beliefs to peruse political power. A tendency of identifying a given territory with a certain religious belief may occur because of that undifferentiated relationship. What the Christian Reformed thinking tries to do is to account for diversified differentiated societal communities, the state and religious institutions, within the framework of the whole religious meaning of human life.

The Christian Reformed thinking opposes the privatization of religion, integrates religious belief within the public square. It understands that religions by which people live exert themselves in the public life, and not only in private quarters. The enlightenment's dichotomy of the secular public sphere on the one hand and the religious private sphere on the other is as such a deep religious worldview. Until the enlightenment era, it was taken for granted that the world is connected to and dependent on God. Therefore, the enlightenment's assumption that the world, the secular, stands on its own, and depends on nothing beyond itself represents a basic change in looking at the world. The enlightenment's worldview, therefore, is not religiously neutral.²⁷

The Christian Reformed thinking admits that all religious beliefs, including the secular worldview, have a right to be integrated into the public life. In other words, the Christian Reformed thought acknowledges directional plurality, plurality of the ultimate understanding of human life. These directions are matter of freedom of choice and cannot be decided by the

²⁷ Ibid., 68,69.

political or religious institutions, for the directional dimension is beyond the competence of the political and religious institutions alike. However, if a society is differentiated in the institutional sense room must be given for differentiated responsibilities of the differentiated institutions. This means that one particular institution, including state and mosque or church, should not monopolize the moral discourse in society. This undifferentiated moral discourse is misleading. The reason is that neither the individual nor the majority of individuals, neither state nor mosque or church holds unlimited competence to exercise indiscriminate responsibility for all society.²⁸ Lawmaking too has to consider the variety of moral obligations that exist simultaneously within a differentiated society. A government, for instance, ought not to pass laws that contradict or violate the legitimate obligations of other social communities, such as religious communities, educational institutes, health care, etc. All differentiated communities of a society have a right to be given equal opportunity to express and practice their moral obligations in the public square.²⁹

The Reformed Christian thinking, therefore, acknowledges religious pluralism.³⁰ It advocates freedom of religions in the public square. This does not mean religious relativism. Yet it is to be understood in terms of differentiated institutions with different moral commitments that transcend the institutions as such. The responsibility of the state is to ensure and protect the freedom of religion for individuals, as a matter of public justice. The question here is not which religion is true or false. Rather it is a question of political justice in a differentiated society that acknowledges the directional plurality. Discussing religious freedom, therefore, begins with the consideration of the differentiated institutions of society. The public legal competency of the state is different from the theological competency of a mosque or church. In other words, religious pluralism requires recognition of the structural pluralism with different obligations in differentiated society. On this basis, religious institutions of the non-governmental realm should not appeal to political or legal power to force other citizens to heed the religious conclusions that they believe in.³¹ The state also should not appeal to religious discourse to peruse political power. The state ought to function within its limited competence, to promote public justice, and

²⁸Jams Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civil Community*, Michigan, Grand Rapids, (Baker Books, 1994), 66-68.

²⁹ Ibid., 70.

³⁰ Skillen discusses structural and directional pluralisms. The contextual pluralism, which pointed out along the structural and directional pluralisms by Griffioen and Mouw in *Pluralisms and Horizons*: 15-19, is not clear enough in Skillen's discussion. Perhaps, this is because Skillen deals with only his American context.

³¹ Skillen (1994), 72.

to protect the free exercise of all religions of its citizens as a matter of its structural responsibility in a differentiated society. Indeed the differentiation between the state and church (or mosque), in the sense of structural plurality, is helpful for a free and just society, but it should be taken into account that the directional plurality transcends these institutions to the ultimate religious meaning of the human life.

VII. Religion, Church, and State

Emphasizing the religious meaning of human life raises a question about the relationship between religion, church and state. According to the Christian Reformed thought, the relationship between religion and state does not mean that we think of the state as a community of faith in the same sense that the church is a community of faith having ‘faith’ as ‘qualifying function’. The state is peculiarly limited to its ‘public juridical qualifying function. As for the church, it is limited to its sphere sovereignty, exactly as the state is limited to its sphere sovereignty, functioning in the modality of faith. Church then is a social community, which has a historical founding function, and a pistical leading function. Obviously, the church is rooted in the supra-temporal kingdom of God in Christ Jesus, but in that, it is not more than the state. Each institution: church or state, does function in its own sphere.³² Therefore, the distinction between church and state is not the same as between religion and state. The state is not religiously neutral. It functions, like all other social communities, in the modality of faith but is not qualified by it. Likewise, the church functions in the juridical aspect, but is not qualified by it, to make its internal laws within its sphere. The distinction, then, between state and church has to do with their internal structural principles and their vocation in the kingdom of God. Part of the confusion of the relationship between state and church has to do with the Middle Ages thinking in this respect. The church at that time, under the influence of Aquinas’s synthesis of ‘nature-grace’ scheme, placed the state in the realm of nature and grace in the realm of the supernatural. As a result, the church was given supremacy over the state. And it was the church that had to decide the borderlines between church and state, which was always in favor of the church’s supremacy.³³ Another remark is to be mentioned also in this respect, the difference between the

³² Ibid., 431

³³ James Skillen, and Rocken McCarthy, *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*: Atlanta, Georgia, (Scholars Press, 1991), 377-408.

liberal idea of separation between state and church and Dooyeweerd's idea of sphere sovereignty. The first one tends to safeguard the freedom of church over against the state. Whereas the second is concerned with the religious struggle over what is true faith, and what is true public justice in both: church and state, respectively, which ultimately transcends the human institutions and concerns the opposition between *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*, city of God and city of man, realizing the rule of God over the entire human life.³⁴

VIII. Creation, Historical Development and Normativity

The crucial question is now: how one can make a normative argument about how diversified societal institutions ought or not ought to be shaped? In this section, I will discuss the source of normativity according to the Christian Reformed thinking by which the proper boundaries and tasks of diversified societal institutions are to be recognized by placing the empirical experience in a framework of creational law.

First of all, one has to mention that the Christian Reformed societal and political thought opposes the 'contract school' of enlightenment, which views individuals as 'abstracted mathematical units', depending on nothing beyond themselves, autonomous individualism. This is why the Christian Reformed thinking appeals to the 'historical school', the empirical experience. However, the mere historical experience is misleading in finding a normative framework. Rather, the normativity is to be found in placing the historical developments in a transcendental creational framework. In order to explain this assumption, I will refer to the efforts of some thinkers, like Burke, Figgis, Gierke who argue that history points toward a certain kind of society.³⁵ Although those thinkers, according to Skillen and McCarthy, appeal to history in their argument, their philosophical or ontological basis for recognizing the proper legitimate identities, tasks and rights of diverse institutions remains unclear. Burke and Figgis, for instance, fail to distinguish adequately between society and state. They also use very often 'social contract' terminology in defending a diversified social order. Burke refers to society or

³⁴ Taylor (1969), 522-537. See also Skillen (1974), 434.

³⁵ James Skillen and Rockne McCarthy, *Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society*: Atlanta, Georgia, (Scholars Press, 1991), 357.

the state and what he has in mind is an organic union of all spheres of a social order, which has evolved and matured in the course of history. He could not adequately account for the difference between society and state. Even though he uses the word ‘state’ sometimes to refer specifically to government, his account lacks for clarity regarding the basis for, and the structure of, a differentiated social order. Figgis in his argument from history for a diversified social order views the state as ‘society of societies’: a composition of social entities or ‘a synthesis of living wills’. Although Figgis’s aim, according to Skillen and McCarthy, is to affirm the multiplicity of ‘societies’ in the state, his reasoning leaves him open to universalist claims by the state over all society. What Figgis wants to do is to look for a way to deny the state substantive authority within other spheres of society. However, his process does not articulate what is the state’s specific limited responsibility and how to establish that limited responsibility, which the state ought to perform among the other social spheres. Moreover, the use of social contract terminology to support this view causes a sort of ambiguity. Burke, for example, speaks of society as presence of ‘artificial institutions’. At the same time, he claims that social institutions are linked to a fixed compact apart from the historical accumulation of individual contract. However, Burke never explains this fixed compact. The historical arguments of Burke and Figgis do not provide us with an ontological and normative basis for judging between the legitimate and illegitimate institutions that come into historical experience.³⁶

According to Skillen and McCarthy, Otto van Gierke’s interpretation of ‘the five periods’ of European history, in which he recognizes the differentiation of state from society in the ‘fifth period’, is his most important contribution. However, van Gierke seeks a universal source of norm from within the German romantic nationalism and the Hegelian interpretation of history. His view is that historical development in Germany is of a universal character for all peoples. He is convinced that history is moving towards the realization of synthesis of human freedom and ordered unity, which will be fully manifested in pluralistically differentiated nations bound together in a highest representative constitutional state. Nevertheless, if the German romantic nationalism is the ‘truth’ of history, then van Gierke’s argument cannot transcend his own historical moment. If, on the other hand, the truth about the direction and aim of history is universal, then the basis of that truth must be deeper than the historical experience of the German

³⁶ Skillen and McCarthy (1991), 358-361.

people.³⁷

Burke, Figgis, and van Gierke, therefore, argue that historical developments lead to a diversified society. However, they only seek norms for that diversity from within the stream of history. In this very point, the Christian Reformed thinking is different. It accounts for the historical development, but placing it within the framework of given creational norms. The contributions of Groen van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, leading Reformed thinkers, demonstrate that they never sought the norms or standards to differentiate between the nature and tasks of diversified societal community in mere historical developments.

Groen van Prinsterer appeals to history, sharing some features of the historical arguments of Burke, Figgis, Gierke, but he never subscribes to the position that the meaning of event emerges only from within the stream of the historical development.³⁸ He, however, along with his historical argument, argues that God's revelation is 'the foundation of justice and morality', of freedom of person and nation³⁹. In a later stage of his life, he came to a broader conception of government as *res publica* under the sovereignty of God. He was the first to use the phrase 'sovereignty in its own sphere' in describing the distinguished social institutions. He, however, did not work this principle out as a creational principle in a universal scope.⁴⁰

Kuyper also was convinced that human beings are social creatures, bearing different responsibilities under the sovereignty of God. He initiated a normative framework for all spheres of human life by speaking of human responsibility under the sovereignty of God in opposition to the kingdom of darkness. However, his political philosophy does not grow and deepen to the point where he is able to elaborate on the notion of public justice as the norm of state's life.⁴¹

Herman Dooyeweerd begins with the creation order as the full meaning of the ontological reality. In other words, everything that exists, including human reality, needs to be understood as depending on and referring to God the Creator. The created order has its meaning from the divinely created meaning and dependency, not from a natural meaning, which can be grasped rationally. The identity of everything, therefore, is to be found in its dependent character as a revelatory creation of God. Dooyeweerd directs our attention to a normative framework, within

³⁷ Ibid., 364-365.

³⁸ Ibid.,

³⁹ Ibid., 366.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 368.

⁴¹ Ibid., 397-402.

which the diversity of social life has to be properly developed, each societal community according to its created nature. In this respect, Dooyeweerd's original contribution was to develop a detailed creational ontological philosophy, as I already explained above. This philosophy is neither reductionist nor absolutist, in the sense that it does not reduce the complex structure of society to its historical modality (in contrast to historicism), nor it does absolutize the logical reasoning (in contrast to rationalism); considering reason as part of created reality, and does not transcend the creation.

The Christian Reformed thinking therefore appeals to history, but not mere history in searching for a normative framework. It places the historical development in a transcendent framework, given in the created order. Within this normative framework, one can distinguish between differentiated societal communities, including church and the state, under the whole religious meaning of human life. This method therefore is a transcendental-empirical one. It accounts for the given norms in the created order. At the same time, it seeks to discover those norms by a direct human experience with reality in terms of analyzing the historical developments.

IX. Conclusion

Christian Reformed political thought integrates religious belief into public life. This integration is interpreted in a philosophical elaboration based on God's sovereignty over all of human life, including politics. This philosophy aims to point out two crucial notions for political thinking. The first is the principle of sphere sovereignty, according to which each societal community is sovereign in its own sphere according to its internal given laws in the created order. The other is differentiation, according to which various societal institutions have come into being by human cultural activity throughout history. Each community has its own differentiated task in human life, corresponding to God's given norms for human culture. Christian thinking therefore makes distinction not separation between religious belief and public life. Accordingly, each differentiated societal community has its distinctive task in human life, and is sovereign in its own sphere according to a given creational law.

Thus, the state-institution is not an all-embracing institution, but it is a societal community among others. It has come into being by human formation throughout history as a

differentiated institution qualified by the norm of public justice according to its internal structural principles. The religious institutions too (whether Islamic or Christian) have come into existence by historical-religious founding function and they are qualified by the aspect of faith. This ontologically based differentiation between the state and the religious institutions guarantees freedom for both of them to function in their own spheres as differentiated societal communities. Each of them is sovereign in its own sphere.

The significance of the norm of public justice as the qualifying function of the state for a religiously pluralistic society is that all the religious communities have the right to be justly treated without any sort of discrimination, whether belonging to majority or minority. The morally responsible way of the state is to protect the independent exercise of religious freedom in the common public square as a matter of public justice. Extension of a particular moral discourse over the other societal communities is of an undifferentiated nature, for neither state nor religious institutions have unlimited competence to exercise indiscriminate responsibility for all society

Thus, Christian Reformed politics has no tendency to identify given geographical territories with Christianity. Rather, it recognizes the structural plurality of human society, in which the state and the religious institutions are differentiated societal community. Each has its own proper place in human society. Recognition of the differentiated relation between the state and the religious institutions would be of help to acknowledge the religious plurality as a matter of public justice, which the state ought to promote in a differentiated society according to its qualifying function.