

# **The Kingship of Christ<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Part I – The Kingship of Christ in His Glory**

### **Series I – Christ’s Kingship Eroded**

#### **Chapter 2: Erosion within Christianity**

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” John 18:37

Some European and American states have traditionally been called Christian countries. Even now, the overwhelming majority claim to ascribe to some aspect of the Christian faith. And while statistics say nothing about people’s personal faith, they do at least show that people are members, active or not, of one of the many denominations within Christianity. And most of these official denominations make the formal claim that they recognize Christ as King. This is certainly the case among churches whose origins are in the Protestant Reformation. It is equally true of the Roman Catholic Church. Most churches of the Protestant Reformation subscribe to one or more of the official historic Reformed confessions which, without exception, are very explicit and detailed about the kingship of Christ. Leaving personal faith commitments aside for the moment and taking instead official statistics, such as census registration, the majority of people in the Western world have voluntarily chosen to register themselves as belonging to one of the Christian denominations that adhere, officially at least, to the concept of Christ’s kingship.

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<sup>1</sup> This article appeared originally in Kuyper’s *Pro Rege*, published in the Dutch language in 1911. The history of this translation is shrouded in history. We do not know who translated it or who edited it, except that Frances A. Boer-Prins and Jan H. Boer did a final touchup, mostly of punctuation. The document was sent to me by a friend who is no longer communicating. You will find a number of irregularities to which we occasionally draw attention in footnotes. All the footnotes in this article are by Jan H. Boer, proprietor and creator of this website, kind of post editing.

But what happens when the statistics are compared with the facts? Lamentably, the actual facts, in terms of what people really believe and the way they live, do not at all agree with the official statistics! Where, in fact, is there any evidence that Christ is being recognized and venerated as our King?

Admittedly, there is a hint or a remnant of that recognition in the Lord's Day observance and in the so-called Christian holidays. Just as Islam has Friday as its day of rest and the Jews Saturday, Christians have Sunday, the first day of the week, as the official day of rest. And even those who have abandoned the Christian faith altogether but who concede that the working class obviously needs a day of rest, agree that Sunday is probably the most convenient day. And even the Christian days have maintained their status throughout the centuries, for whatever reason. Originally, the Puritans in Scotland wanted to do away with them, not because Puritans were disloyal to Christ but because of a spiritualizing tendency within the movement which dictated that observing specific days would distract from the true meaning of the event. But despite opposition from some quarters, the day of Jesus' birth, the day of His crucifixion, the day of His resurrection the day of His ascension, and the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, were recognized and observed as Christian holidays and were also incorporated by the state as official statutory holidays. Rather superficial and meaningless, perhaps, when considered from that point of view, but in their official capacity those days carry some weight. Not, of course, in the sense that the observance of those days contribute meaningfully to the kingship of Christ or to peoples' awareness of His glory, but those days are proof positive that the Christian tradition is a deeply rooted fact in the life of Western nations. Those days, together with the official census, attest to the Christian veneer of the Western world, however nominal.

In addition to the Christian holidays and Lord's Day observance, traditional Christianity also made an impact on education. In many Western countries, schools are still obligated to impart certain Christian values. But this presents a problem. As history shows, the intent was to divorce those Christian values from the root of faith in Christ as our king and refashion them to conform to the demands of a common morality. In other words, the kingship of Christ was forgotten and the morals distilled from Christianity were absorbed into a common code. Sometimes it was grudgingly admitted that the Christian pillar, as one of the pillars of our civilization, was superior, from a moral point of view, to any other pillar upholding our civilization, but that was all. There was no attempt even to

distinguish so-called Christian values from so-called common virtues, values or morals. The result was that the Christian influence was soon absorbed by the common or neutral interest. And this amalgam of virtues, including both Christian and neutral, was then marketed to the public within a so-called “neutral” framework, whose basis soon became locked in mortal combat with the Christian basis! Predictably, the people who were still serious about the kingship of Christ shunned those schools like the plague, while those who had abandoned Christ and Christianity considered those schools the ultimate achievement in education. The end result was that generations inundated by the spirit of the “neutral” schools were thrown into skepticism and agnosticism and given to a secularist way of life.

Together with the holiday and Lord’s Day observance, the influx of truncated Christian values into an otherwise secular school is all that remains of a Christian character in Western society. Some governments invoke the name of God at the opening of parliament and God may warrant some vague allusion in a throne speech, but the reference is so innocuous that even the most hard-bitten atheist couldn’t object. Some countries have also dropped the Bible from the courtroom. And when a Christian statesman dares to remind the people of the Christian foundation of our society, he invariably elicits vehement protests. It often seems that even history has to be rewritten to accommodate the agnostic; often the most factual presentation of our Christian roots is considered downright offensive and, irrational as it may seem, can cause people to come to blows. Whenever and wherever there is a trace of the Christian element in official circles, it is never more than a cold formality. Sad to say, recognition of Christ as God’s anointed King has vanished without a trace from the life of our nations.

So much for official circles, such as the state and the functioning of government. But what about the public arena?

Generally speaking, there are three groups of people in our society. There is the so-called silent majority, a rather reticent and deferential group of people who provide little direction and who are content to let others do the leading and the talking. The second group participates actively in the life of the nation but its members do not set the tone. Finally there is a small but powerful and influential group of people who provide leadership in nearly every area of life and who articulate the national consciousness to those at home and abroad.

The last group is the vocal minority and largely instrumental in forming public opinion. The second group is most comfortable in the marketplace and, until recently, refrained from forming or influencing public life. The first group is by far the most numerous and is made up of people who are content to strive for limited, personal objectives in life, such as the family, the job and the small business.

The vocal, dominant minority includes the following: publishers, university professors and other academics, the teaching profession in general, authors, artists, journalists and editors of the news media, senior civil servants, politicians and statesmen, presidents of large corporations; in brief, anyone who, for one reason or another, has come to occupy a prominent place in society.

In Islamic society, even the most “heretical” Muslim, whether prominent or not, will nevertheless venerate Mohammed and honor his memory, but can it be said of the prominent in our society that they are inspired in any way by the idea of Christ’s kingship? Is there any evidence in public life that this group of influential people has any respect for Christ’s name or feels any need to translate the confession of Christ’s kingship into public deeds? Do any of these people show even the slightest sign of irritation if Christ’s name is not honored in the public domain? Can it be said that our public arena adequately reflects our sense of dedication to Christ? Does our national consciousness, which supposedly originated from Christian action, still testify to its Christian origins? Is there any reassurance, any verbalization of intent, which tells us that our national consciousness will forever remain rooted in the kingship of Jesus Christ? Is there any evidence of loyalty to Christ in our national consciousness or our national policy? Despite the diversity of our faith, is there an Islam-like dedication which remains true and faithful to Christ and shudders at the idea that Christ’s holy name might someday lose its ultimate significance for our national existence?

Unfortunately, no!

Though there may be some animated rearguard actions in defense of Christ’s name from a variety of Christian interest groups, the group of those who are prominent do not champion the idea of Christ’s kingship in any area of life. Not only is there no loyalty, they are not even aware there is any reason for loyalty. While the whole of Islam still worships the Prophet, the regnant forces in Western society either blithely ignore or openly oppose the idea of giving Christ’s kingship public scope.

By and large, the only mention of Jesus Christ is in a comparative context. Historically, it is impossible not to mention Him. He is often favorably compared with the founders of other world religions, like Kung Fu, Buddha and Mohammed. Jesus is often said to have had a more sensitive and more advanced religious intuition. Among the religious gurus of history, Jesus is given a preeminent place. As human being, the rabbi of Nazareth was a man of exceptional talent. We haven't yet plummeted quite as far as Voltaire! It is also generally acknowledged that Christian morality is probably superior to any other. But Christ's kingship plays no role in public opinion at all; worse yet, nobody even knows what it is! And though Jesus' religious and ethical intuition is still highly respected, modern man is also convinced in his own mind that plateaus of religious and ethical expression higher than those of Jesus exist, through which we can reach an ultimate social utopia. This, of course, is consistent with the view of Social Darwinism and religious evolutionism.

Partial recognition of Christ as a morality preacher par excellence can be found among modern preachers whose theology has been spiked by liberal doses of evolutionist thinking. They are men who, ex officio at least, are still required to proclaim Jesus Christ. But even they form only a small part of that "vocal minority," and since this group on the whole has divorced itself entirely from Christian tradition, it is much more common not to hear any mention of Jesus Christ at all. To them the Christian tradition is no more than a fossil. These people are in control and there is really no incentive to make Christ an issue. Their existence, their thinking, their acting, their propaganda studiously avoids any mention of Christ. Christ no longer exists for them. Judging from their science, their art, their literature, their news media, none of them have sufficient spiritual spark to ask for Christ, to make the idea of His kingship more clear or to enrich themselves and their nation by renewed dedication to Christ's honor. In fact, most of them would probably be genuinely perplexed if asked what Christ's kingship meant in their lives.

There is more. Christ was destined "to cause the falling and rising of many ...". People can try to avoid or ignore Him, but in the affairs of a nation and its people it is impossible to have nothing whatsoever to do with Christ.

For those who confess, the name of Christ still exist. Throughout history many pivotal events have taken place because of the cross of Golgotha. Even now literature, the news media and politics have to deal with a complex problematic that is in some way connected with Christ, with His followers, or with the meaning

of Jesus Christ relative to the past. For example, there's the tacky problem concerning church and state; there is still the problem of education; there are multiple questions raised by universities; there's the problem of giving Christians some voice in politics; there's the problem of appointments at various levels in both church and state and, finally, there are the overriding baffling questions regarding religious and ethical direction in a society. Really, Christ is unavoidable. Sooner or later He will always become part of the discussion concerning the big issues that face us. That is the way it has been in centuries past and that's how it will continue. The problems seem to become increasingly more complicated and it has already become evident to some that there is really no resolution to the problems facing mankind without turning to sources outside man himself. That is why, despite considerable opposition, many from that vocal minority are compelled to address their feelings about Jesus in an effort to find some solutions.

But what are some of those feelings? What motivates the overwhelming majority of these prominent people? What else but a deeply rooted repugnance for God's special revelation? Resistance to every form of confession and every truth distilled from that revelation. Resistance to the Trinity, God's revelation in the flesh, redemption through the blood of the Lamb. To God's own declaration in Psalm 2: "I have installed My king on Zion, My holy hill," the cynics sneer in reply. And when those faithful to Christ's honor as our King dare oppose the cynics, they are met with subtle sarcasm and acid scorn designed to embarrass them into silence. The result is an implacable hostility so powerful and so aggressive that it will not stop until the image of Christ as God's anointed king has been completely obliterated.

Admittedly, there are also people of less vociferous character who frown on such techniques and who preach tolerance for all, including the believer. But although more philosophical and broad-minded, they too look down their condescending noses at the credulous and backward believer. They also see Christianity as antiquated, something obsolete, beyond which they themselves have fortunately progressed. Whoever still adheres to fossilized Christian beliefs is "behind the times." They are convinced that Christians who as yet swear by their orthodoxy will eventually evolve to a higher stage of development and will presently say farewell to their illusions regarding Christ and his kingship. In other words, they purr, smiling indulgently; progress, including the progress of ideas and religion, is inescapable. For the most part, the leaders in Western societies, the people who

set the trend in the public arena, have little respect for Christianity. On the contrary, as has long been the case in France, dominant elements in most Western societies seem bound and determined to be rid of Christianity altogether. This may be done by absorbing Christianity into liberal humanism. Perhaps it may be more expeditious to simply let it die of old age or, alternately, it may be attacked with vigor and bludgeoned to death. Whatever the means, the purpose is the same: to isolate and eventually extinguish the spark of Christianity.

The claim that dominant circles in our society are determined to silence the voice of Christianity is no exaggeration. It is true and inarguable. Merely follow the news media or read contemporary literature. Listen to parliamentarians and politicians. Sit in on group discussions on any number of topics and you can be certain that the name of Jesus Christ will be studiously avoided or, if mentioned at all, always noncommittally or casually and never in connection with His God-given kingship.

You may already have been offended by deplorable conditions in our own country, but the feeling will become downright painful once you've visited the Islamic world.

To all Muslims, whether rich or poor, illiterate or learned, silent or vocal, Mohammed is the Prophet of honor. Admittedly, over the years many points of orthodox Islamic doctrine have been compromised. In many ways, Islamic religious observance has experienced many changes, many for the worse. Where European and American influences are strongest, many Muslims have opted out of certain ritual and ceremonial requirements, at least as far as their private lives are concerned. But in the public arena, and especially in the presence of Christians, the enthusiasm of the Muslim for his exalted Prophet remains. He is and always will be the Prophet sent by God!

In contrast, Christian societies of the West betray shocking indifference and raging hostility toward the revelation brought by Christ. In fact, in our public arena the spark of Christianity has been all but extinguished. Certainly there is no mention at all of Christ as King. Is the situation as it confronts us today not deplorable in the extreme?

**PRO REGE!**

### **Chapter 3 – The eclipse in the community**

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

Psalm 149:2

Although few among the ruling elite, the vocal minority, could reasonably be expected to champion Christ's cause, influenced as they are by the spirit of the times, we might fully expect the followers of Christ to proclaim Christ's name unambiguously and publicly.

However, that's not the case. Instead, there is only agonizing silence in circles which should by rights form the vanguard of Christ's kingship.

Don't get me wrong; Christ's followers do not lack the reverent awe one might expect for a *savior*. In fact, Christ as *savior* is the focal point of their praise. But that's not what I'm talking about. Right now, we're discussing the kingship of Christ, the throne which is the seat of power and the ultimate crown of glory which God has placed on His head. The complaint, quite simply, is that the memory of His august kingship has also been erased from the hearts and minds of His own elect.

The fact that He was "highly exalted" and "given a name above every name" (Philippians 2:9) in order that He might reconcile us to God through His ultimate

self-sacrifice as high priest is something angels understand very well. The fact that He is deserving of all praise and fealty causes angels to sing their never-ending praise and give their unquestioning allegiance and service to Him Who, sitting at the right hand of the Father, reigns in honor and in majesty. On earth, however, the awareness of the supreme majesty of His kingship is regrettably very dim. Of course, no Christian would dare deny that majesty. Far from it. After all, Christ's majesty shines forth from virtually every page of God's holy word. And, moreover, our confessions attest to His majesty. Our children learn about His majesty from the catechism. Several of our hymns are dedicated to it. And the majesty of His kingship is the theme of many a sermon. In fact, who among us would not vigorously rise to Christ's defense if His kingship were deliberately maligned?

Although this is all true, it hardly reaches the heart of the matter. Though we may be grateful for the heritage we have, it can hardly be considered a passion. At least, not the kind of passion that caused people to rise to the occasion when their national security, their way of life and their freedoms were maligned by national socialism or communism.<sup>2</sup> Then people stood shoulder to shoulder to resist peril and millions gave their lives for the cause. And ever after the heroes of the hour, whether military or governmental, were worshiped without reserve by the rank and file. But should not our passion for God's anointed King, sparked and animated by the Holy Spirit Himself, exceed by far our passions for national security and liberties? And if our puny passion for the majesty of our heavenly King is compared with our heady zeal for more mundane concerns, should we not feel properly embarrassed?

True, there is concern, even zeal, for Christ. One person may show more than another, but there is always a measure of zeal either to proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ or to perform deeds of mercy and charity.

And yet, this is nearly always done in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior; it always focuses on Christ the Redeemer, Christ the Surety, Christ the Reconciler. But to what extent is Christ's kingship included in that praise? Astonishing as it may seem, Christ's person has been split in two, with Christ the Savior getting a great deal of deserved praise, but Christ the King getting none.

People want to be saved the moment they become aware of their total misery. They want to flee to the Savior just as soon as they rid themselves of their

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<sup>2</sup>Here we have an example of footnote 1. The translator seems to have inserted references here to movements that did not exist during Kuyper's time.

hypocrisy and realize they need His deliverance. They want to be reconciled to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world the minute they realize the mortal peril their souls are in. They are thankful for their deliverance as soon as they become children of God sprinkled with the blood of reconciliation. But what's behind all this?

What is the cause, the motivation? What else but a sanctified egoism? The fundamental motivation is people's love for themselves, which is not – don't get me wrong – a false motivation. On the contrary; people's love for themselves would be wrong if they stayed away from their Savior altogether and sought fulfillment for their dreams merely in themselves. But to focus only on Christ as Savior does betray an urge to be saved by Him from misery. People are spiritually sick so they turn to the one and only Physician. People feel themselves sinking ever further into sin, feel crushed by the wrath of the holy God, and they desperately reach out for the Savior's cloak, knowing that only then can they be delivered from deep despair and damnation. They look eternal doom in the eye, so to speak, and desperately cling to Him who has overcome death. And that's as it should be. The angels in heaven will sing out praise for every sinner thus saved. But however necessary, however touching, it really only concerns the reconciliation and salvation of people. It is only to open up new life to them. As such, turning to Jesus is for the benefit of their salvation, without actually promoting an understanding of what it means to live, act and think for the glory of Jesus.

Even if Christ's love activated a genuine mutual love for Him, or if the gratitude for being saved brought songs of praise and adulation, or even if, for Jesus' sake, time, money and talents, together with all energies and dedication, were invested in great acts of Christian love, even then the reaction is only one of thankfulness and possibly a sense of duty toward a physician who has applied his healing to a mortal ill, or toward a rescuer who has given his life for others. The reaction is an expression of the heart of the person saved, rescued and given new life. Strictly speaking the reaction is one of praise and thanksgiving to Jesus as the only High Priest. But what of the King? Is that not something very different? Is the king not much more than the high priest who brings reconciliation to our lives?

Mission efforts feature the same appeal to the Savior. Devout parents, concerned that their children grow up close to Jesus, do so mainly to introduce them to a life of grace and teach them about their eternal inheritance. The same is true of adults as well. Most Christians who seek to convert relatives and friends focus

their plea mainly on deliverance and salvation. And the same is true of missionary efforts at home or abroad; the primary purpose is to save from damnation and to bring the light of redemption into the world. All appeals for conversion, for exchanging a life in the kingdom of this world to life in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, is predicated on Jesus as the instrument of salvation. Jesus is presented as the means to deliverance, the only healer of ills and diseases, the way unto salvation and eternal life. Usually it is concern for the sinner that motivates the mission effort. It is based on the certain belief that the Great Physician is always there and that the medicine which can save men from death is always available. Realizing that many people do not know the Great Physician or His therapy, it seems logical to introduce them to Jesus as the Great Physician, knowing that the unfailing power of His redemptive grace, as efficacious medicine, can pluck people from despair and save them from their doom. However, the question is: What does the high priestly grace of Jesus per se have to do with honoring his kingship?

I do not mean to suggest that seeking deliverance from sin and salvation unto eternal life is dishonorable or wrong; in fact, it would be a terrible affront to God as our creator if that yearning did not exist. As well, we would be remiss if we were not motivated by a burning desire to alert our fellow creatures to their despair and possible deliverance. Because, of course, Christ was also anointed to be our eternal High Priest, and anyone who is not transformed by the grandeur of Christ's priesthood could never honor and respect Him in His function as King. But, although we may never abandon Christ's honor as high priest, we must be acutely aware that God's holy word, in addition to calling Him our High Priest, introduces Him unambiguously as our eternal King anointed by God. How then can we ever give proper honor to Jesus as our High Priest if we remain indifferent about His honor as our King?

What is true of those who see Jesus only as their High Priest is also true of those who see Him only as their Prophet. In fact, the criticism is even more applicable there. A large number of people see Jesus only as a Prophet. In a sense, it may be said they do not really form part of the body of genuine believers, but I don't wish to do that. In this day and age with its rampant godlessness and so many millions of people who refuse steadfastly to acknowledge the highest Prophet and Teacher and instead elevate their own wisdom and knowledge above the Word of God, we would do well to be receptive to those who, irritated by the disdainful skepticism of the world, at least come to the defense of Jesus as the world's

ultimate Prophet. Admittedly, to leave it at that misses the point of Christ's coming altogether and is nowhere near the crux of our confessions about Jesus. But even though these people may relate only to Jesus the Prophet, our approach to them should be: "Do not reject them. Whoever is not against me is for me." Especially in times as bleak and vacuous as this, we should be attentive to and thankful for any mention of His name, however much the testimony may conflict with the Biblical understanding of Christ's threefold function.

We must remain accessible to those people who continue to mention Jesus' name, however unaffected they may be by the mystery of God's work of justification and however unreceptive to the atoning work of our High Priest. True, as these people focus on Jesus as the ultimate Prophet, they concern themselves only with Jesus' spoken words. They distill from the total scope of His work only His moral teachings. They admit to the superiority of Christ's moral teaching and, by following His example, they believe to be able to gain access to God's communion.

But these people may do this for one of two reasons. Either they see Jesus as little more than a religious genius, a paragon of human virtues, someone perhaps along the line of Socrates and Plato. There is little sense for a true believer to attempt a dialogue with such a person. But there are others who confess that Jesus Christ was indeed our highest Prophet, the He is God revealed in the flesh, not merely another human being with a relatively superior code of ethics. There is every reason for believers to be receptive to anyone who confesses that Jesus Christ is God. But the essential testimony, Thomas' confession, "My Lord and my God," must always be the epicenter of any communion true believers have with other people, such as those who confess only to Christ's prophetic function. If the deity of Christ is not acknowledged, talking about His supreme priestly function becomes meaningless and void.

If we are to include all people who still acknowledge Christ's prophetic role while fully recognizing the deity of Christ – as indeed we must – it means there are a great many people who still champion at least part of God's revelation and who actively confront the godless tendencies in our society with the ethical scope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Of those I've discussed so far, people who focus on Christ's priestly function, the former are probably closer to an understanding of the Kingdom of God. For the

latter, a greater understanding of the Word of God would eventually lead them to acceptance of Christ as their High Priest.

However that may be, both groups are still far away from an understanding of Christ's kingship. Though the ethical Christian may be very eloquent about Jesus as his only prophet, and though the missionary may be enthralled by Jesus as his only high priest, in nearly every instance a profound awareness of Christ's kingship is sadly lacking. And, unfortunately, taken altogether, these two groups pretty well make up the whole body of believers. So what of Christ's kingship?

Even recognizing Christ as the head of the body is not the same as recognizing His kingship. The head of a body is a mystical, organic concept. It has to do with an organic community of one faith, hope and love. And every community, every organization, can be compared to a body and, needless to say, everybody must have a head.

Many Christians, inclined to a mystical life, actively seek the communion of God's saints. They see this communion integrated and animated by Christ and, as such, confess Christ to be the head of their community. And as they confess Him to be their head, they also naturally believe that Christ leads them. There is, of course, such a thing as a mystical union with Christ. Unfortunately, the Christian mystical movement has itself absorbed all kinds of questionable, purely philosophic ideas and often the gems of Scripture have been buried under all kinds of non-biblical debris. But even in truly Christian mystical circles a confession of Christ as head of the community is not at all like confessing His kingship.

Weaker even than the mystical concept of Jesus as head of the community, is its limitation to the church as, for example, in the traditional opposition to the papacy. Because Protestant Christians do not recognize an earthly substitute for Christ, they often tend to identify their own views with those of Christ, without actually pointing to Him. And although this may appear to agree with the kingship of Christ, this limited application really does no justice to the full scope of Christ's majesty as the King of all believers. It restricts the idea of Christ's kingship to church government. And because the church government has such limited scope and a rather simple form, especially when compared to the full sweep of life, it falls well short of a full recognition of the majesty of Jesus' kingship. Of course, church government is included in Christ's kingship, but the church is so flawed, so frail, and so limited in scope and power that it cannot possibly be identified with the majestic fullness of Christ's total kingship.

So much for my complaint that the concept of the kingship of Christ has really made no inroads into our lives, not just the life of the “world” where the kingship is openly denied and opposed, but also in the lives of most believers.

Briefly, Christians do honor Christ as God incarnate. They kneel before Him in supplication. They swear by Him as their only high prophet. They confess him as their only high priest. They are receptive to His inspiration as head of the body. In the area of the church, everything is done in His name. And, admittedly, Christians testify to the kingship of Christ in all its eternal majesty and glory, both in writing and by word of mouth, but that’s really as far as it goes. Confessing, testifying and defending can be just so much talk.

The deeds are lacking. Not everywhere, of course. I certainly don’t want to pass judgment on someone’s personal relationship to the Savior. To do that would require a very intimate knowledge of people’s hearts; except for a few close friends, perhaps, that’s not even possible. How many of us can say anything about the spiritual lives of our children or even of ourselves? But we are allowed to measure the level and intensity of our commitment to Christ on the basis of overt, public deeds – or lack of them – done in the name of Christ’s kingship. Having said that, I cannot help but feel that the zeal and energy in the world of Islam for the prophet Mohammed is immeasurably greater than our enthusiasm for Christ as God’s anointed King. This failure has emasculated Christianity. It has robbed it of its power. It is the woeful lack, the dismal failure to honor Christ above all and to serve Him as our King that has stripped our witness of its central meaning.

## **Chapter 4 – General Apostasy**

. . . until the rebellion occurs . . . II Thessalonians 2:3

The declining kingdom awareness came from two sides simultaneously. First, Christ's kingship was rejected in the broad circle of the intelligentsia. Second, it lost its appeal to believers. That's true; we always tend to blame the "world" and thereby justify, or at least explain, our own inaction.

As well, so often in our circles, positive Christian action is aborted by indignant cries for "humility." And usually such cries for humility are most loudly heard among those who wanted to resist Christian action of any kind. They preach humility relentlessly and add that it is a prerequisite for action. And because no one can practice humility to the satisfaction of someone else, action always remains stillborn. A sedative for the inert!

Certainly, personal humility for personal sin and personal disloyalty is always necessary. But what I have in mind is humility for general, cultural malaise, social

evils and indifference in the churches. No one but the most eloquent speakers or the most astute religious leaders can generate the kind of humility, and even then only temporarily. A great public speaker may be able to enthrall an audience for a while and convince them of the need to feel humble in the face of so much evil in society, but how long does that last? Once they leave the hall that feeling of humility is soon erased by the complexity of life. Anyone who is realistic enough to perceive the evils in the world is also psychologically perceptive enough to know that general humility for universal social ills will not endure unless concrete steps are taken immediately to erase the evil. Such a general humility is useful, necessary even, if men are prepared to take some drastic measures to address themselves to that evil in the name of the Lord. But if people discourage action for reasons of communal guilt which, of course, includes the Christian, they are both hopelessly gullible and deceptive to the extreme. The cry “???”<sup>3</sup> has intense personal meaning, but it cannot be applied in the corporate sense. It then becomes nothing but an excuse for inaction.

Inaction is a copout that douses all the sparks of the spirit and eventually leads to depression and inertia. True, the decisive moments of history were ruled by a very impressive spirit of humility, the humility that activated people to do what they felt they had to do. It may be compared to the battlefield where even battle-tested, hardened soldiers cringe at the explosive sound of artillery fire. When I pointed to the lack of enthusiasm among believers for Christ’s kingship, it was not to quash their zeal; on the contrary, it was to provide some perspective on existing conditions and to determine more clearly the actions we should take.

We are living in days of general apostasy, though perhaps not the great rebellion which is to precede the end of time. The times and seasons are under God’s control and it would be tricky, to say the least, to commit ourselves to specific predictions. History has shown just how tricky. Repeatedly it turned out that God’s ways are higher than ours and that the sun shone yet another day precisely when many Christians thought the end had come. But although Christians have repeatedly been wrong about specific predictions, many of us have immunized ourselves against the coming of the end of time because things among us are not too bad. Unfortunately, we have lost sight of the general apostasy, the spirit of godlessness, which is rapidly claiming the world. Though we may disagree vehemently with public opinion, castigate those who perpetuate social evils and

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<sup>3</sup>Apparently neither the translator nor the editor understood the original here. Having translated other Kuyper writings, I can well understand their difficulty. We will let it rest.

bemoan increasing degeneracy, we seem unable to recognize the general character of this increasing apostasy and are blissfully unaware of the perilous implications these evils have for our own circles and the next generation. We are, after all, of Zion. And, sitting safely on the mountain, we can censure other people while we feel relatively secure. But this explains precisely why we don't understand what is going on beyond the narrow confines of our pale, and are therefore impotent to apply our influence to set it straight.

The lack of agreement, in many cases contentiousness, among Christians is best illustrated by the almost constant squabbling and even fratricide between groups of Christians. There's hardly ever any agreement. Nor can that be expected. Individualism is too prominent among us. Moreover, that individualism is conditioned and reinforced by our own martial past. That we will always disagree about virtually everything is almost a certainty. But it is disturbing and depressing to look back over the past hundred years or so and to realize that the so-called issues which have caused so much division and occasioned so much viciousness have really been trivialities when compared to the monumental attacks that have been launched against the Christian community by God's enemies from outside. While those powerful enemies mobilized and escalated their attacks on fortress Christianity, the defenders were hopelessly at odds about such trivial personal preferences as color and style of uniform or choice of flag.

Such incidental questions are possibly of secondary importance, but they should not present obstacles to a vigorous defense of the fortress. In peacetime, perhaps, such problems might be negotiated at leisure. When the enemy is battering at the gate, however, only priorities should prevail. And the prime directive of the Christian community is to defend itself with might and main against the assailants from outside. But the fact that Christians remain hopelessly divided seems to indicate that most of them are unaware of the perils that have been unleashed against them. And because they do not see the danger, they can afford the luxury of becoming involved in all kinds of petty disputes, thereby dissipating their strength and leaving the fortress undefended.

Another problem with lack of unity and immobility is lack of love, a Christian love that should consolidate the Christian community. Rancor and distrust within only confirms to those outside that the love of Christ is not to be found inside fortress Christianity. The vehemence and intemperance with which theologians assail one another has become metaphorical. What divides Nestorians, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Arminians and Copts but arid theological disputes that raged centuries

ago? In the meantime, their witness among Islam in the Near and Far East has been rendered totally ineffective. There, too, Christians did not perceive the true peril but instead became embroiled in issues of a secondary and even tertiary nature. When, centuries later, Islam marched through the Middle East, Christians, sadly divided and immobilized, were unable to put up much of a defense. They had frittered away their energies and, once divided, they were easily conquered. Not that the issue which eventually divided Christians in the Near and Far East were of no consequence at all, but the overriding issue, the prime directive, the maintenance and growth of Christ's church, was swamped by the constant wrangling within.

Christians must become aware of the fact that their small community is not hermetically sealed off from the world of spirits outside. Moreover, Christians should realize that those alien spirits are becoming increasingly more apostate. And they are becoming increasingly more totalitarian as well, which means it assails not only Christianity but every other religion as well. The life of our society is becoming increasingly secular, and that secularization becomes more intense with every passing generation. That applies not only to Christians but also to Jews and even to a number of Muslims, though admittedly less so. Among the three main monotheistic religions there is a definite decline in religious sensitivity. It is also clear why.

In none of these three religions does the decline affect the entire membership. Among the lower classes the overwhelming majority remain true to historic tradition. But the decline is most noticeable among the upper classes and the elite; this decline is motivated by a spirit that departs radically from religion. They are no longer attuned to things unseen. They are motivated by the spirit of the times which propounds an entirely different worldview than those of the three major religions. But that spirit, the spirit of modernity, has a way of filtering down to the lower classes of society as well. It is like dye added to a bowl of water; gradually the dye reaches further and further into the bottle until in the end there is a complete color change. Within the spirit of modernity there may be both a cynical-materialistic and idealistic-mystical tendency, but the first is by far the most dominant. The cynical-materialistic view grows ever stronger and puts a powerful claim on succeeding generations.

There are still some intellectuals who, although not idealistic, still resist the encroachments of both cynicism and materialism. But their number is so small and their influence so negligible that it hardly has any impact at all. But even if

taken altogether, these three groups, the idealistic, the intellectual and the mystical, constitute only an insignificant minority in the society of today. Their total influence on the course of history is minimal.

The genuine hope cherished by many modern theologians that someday all people would progress to a higher form of religion which would reintroduce religious sensitivity has ended in catastrophe. *The idea that we must somehow transcend our mundane existence and focus instead on things beyond is in direct conflict with my belief that our “mundane existence” is our proper focus.*<sup>4</sup>

*It is precisely our existence here on earth that contains the focus of our living, whether that be in business, in art, in science or in sport. We have been placed here on this earth, in this world, and we can no more shake off those relationships than step out of our skin. To contemplate and focus on what lies above and beyond is not part of our God-given earthly task. To pretend to know anything meaningful about what transcends our earthly existence is pointless and deceptive sophistry.*

There are many reasons for this preoccupation with what lies beyond, but the main cause is the decline in activity of our genuine religious awareness. And, upon closer inspection, it is evident that this is not limited merely to a small circle of modern thinkers but has even infiltrated the wider circle of believers, though happily to a lesser degree.

However much the personal faith life of the Christian may be concentrated in his conversion to the triune God, no one, not even the most devout, can escape the effect of modern trends in the world. Sometimes the spiritual dimension is the dominant factor in the life of a nation. That is usually followed by a period of traditionalism, when people yearn for values and conditions that have long since passed. After that comes a period of compromise, when religious values are diluted by values of other kinds. Finally, there is total spiritual collapse. That is perhaps best illustrated by what happened after the Reformation. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries religion was life, not merely for the believer but also for those who opposed religion. Religion was the criterion for everything. To everyone's way of thinking, religion was the highest priority. Everyone knew the ins and outs of religion; they talked about it openly and many people brought the ultimate sacrifice in the interest of religion. The sixteenth and seventeenth

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<sup>4</sup>Italics by Jan H. Boer.

centuries had a religious awareness that became the envy of subsequent generations.

But this already changed in the latter part of the seventeenth century. In the first half of the eighteenth century there was a deterioration of religious awareness that would have shocked earlier generations. And by the end of the eighteenth century, religious life and values had begun to decompose.

Since then came the great revival movements, some of which, such as in The Netherlands, resulted in national actions on a broad front. That injection was badly needed at the time. But however widespread and profound the revival movements may have been, they can ill compare with what happened in the seventeenth century. By and large, the revival movements were limited to the so-called spiritual aspect of man and did not result in any concrete societal action. Revival movements in general were much narrower in scope, much less intense, much less profound than what happened during the Reformation.

The early twentieth century, even more so than the nineteenth, is dominated more by material interests than by religious. And whatever religious movement there may be lacks the devout energy it had during previous times. That is generally true; It is a universal phenomenon. The religious atmosphere is unhealthy and oppressive, lacking the spiritual ozone that inspired our religious forebears into deeds of valor. Every now and then there are indications that things are changing for the better, though not at all like a general awakening, a midsummer night storm that clears the air and rinses the dust from the foliage.

I am not suggesting that God's grace is not powerful enough to uphold one's personal faith during these oppressive times or that he does not inspire one's faith to great deeds of valor, but it's undeniable that the air we breathe has a great impact on us. And because the atmosphere is oppressive, faith life loses its vigorous expression to a large degree, especially among those whose power of conviction has not reached maturity. And if this is true among believers, it is even more true of those who stand outside the faith. If the tide of Christian conviction runs strong, even those outside the mainstream of Christianity tend to be carried along with it. If not, as is the case nowadays, then the Christian witness becomes so feeble that it has virtually no influence on other forces at all. But if we become aware of the dilemma we're in, at least we can be thankful to the Lord for whatever witness is still left among us, in order that we can address ourselves in

God's power and compassion to the spiritual derelicts in other circles of our society.

## **Chapter 5 – Great is Man**

Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.

Psalm 73:9

In contrast to Islam's energetic adherence to the prophet Mohammed, Christianity's vigor for Christ's kingship has all but died. And it died not only among the elite, the dominant segment of our population, but it also faded slowly among the believers themselves, though for a different reason. On the religious Richter scale, the shock waves recorded by religious activity nowadays even fail to move the needle. The spirit of modernity has taken the wind out of the Christian sails. The spirit of this age has all but neutralized the total effect of the Christian message. Just as society recognizes the existence of people with an artistic

predisposition it also recognizes the existence of people with a religious or mystical predisposition. But in terms of the total sweep of life these people are little more than incidental.

Even during the most adverse of times, religion tends to have a moralizing influence in the public sector and many pay lip service to the nobility and moral supremacy of Christianity, but even artists and certain groups of intellectuals have a somewhat modifying influence on public affairs; both religion and art have only a peripheral influence on the spirit of modernity. The main thrust stimulating the direction and speed of social affairs is that of material interests as represented by the majority of intellectuals and modern technocrats. By and large, the heroes of faith are to be found among the long list of martyrs. Art's greatest accomplishments were by people like Dante and Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Rubens. But the big names of our materialist society, for the most part at any rate, are the men of science, the men who gave us the nuclear age, the space age and the bewitching world of electronic gadgetry.<sup>5</sup>

This is something we have to recognize. Those who wish to influence the life of a society have to recognize very clearly what the dominant forces in that society are. At present, those dominant forces are not religious; in fact, those forces have a distinctly anti-religious bent. That anti-religious bent is partly because of hostility toward God, but basically because it is generally felt that the dominance of religion is a thing of the past and should not be permitted to re-emerge.

But what is the cause of this disturbing phenomenon? The first remarkable thing is the change in relationship between man and nature. While centuries ago, man was still at the mercies of natural forces around him, he has quite suddenly learned to subject many natural forces to his own powers of manipulation. The difference between eighteenth-century man and twentieth-century man is incredible. Suddenly man grew up. While in the eighteenth century, man still shuddered at the powerful forces unleashed against him, twentieth-century man doesn't even give it a second thought.

Our power over nature has literally mushroomed. While before, man felt inferior and insignificant, he now feels he has everything under control. He knows that he can modify, temporize, change and in many instances completely control the forces of nature. During the past two centuries man has steadily advanced in his

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<sup>5</sup>Here we have another example described in footnote 2.

conquest of nature. Whereas before, he felt much like a puppet, he now feels like the engineer.

Even though not every natural force has been subjected to man's hegemony, his victories over nature, his progress, has been so consistent and so relentless that he is completely confident about further victories down the road. Each decade, each year, man is surprised by the extent of his own power. And it breeds a self-assuredness that makes man feel completely confident about his own powers and accomplishments. Moreover, the results of his triumphs filter down through the whole society. Both man and woman, young and old, rich and poor benefit from his progress. The result is that society as a whole, not just a few isolated natural scientists, grows up with the idea that man is superior to nature.

This is also true of believers who, although they may resent the worldly application of that progress, nevertheless share in its benefits. And, needless to say, their mentality is also deeply affected by the inroads of science and progress.

The total effect of man's natural triumphs have been adverse for religion. Even though I don't agree with Schleiermacher's conclusion that religious awareness is no more than a feeling of total dependency, it is true that the feeling of dependency has always been an integral part of religion. The feeling of dependency on an almighty God has always played a powerful role, especially when we are confronted with our own insignificance in the face of natural disasters. Epidemics, diseases and death, air disasters, fire and flood, lightning and earthquakes, crop failures for whatever reason, they always fill us with a sense of impotence and insignificance. And whenever any of these things happened people predictably tried to alleviate their needs by appealing to a higher being. A man with a terminal illness learned to pray best when the efforts of the doctors had failed. Epidemics always drove people back to their worship temples. During a shipwreck, even rough and tumble sailors were driven to their knees. During earthquakes, people almost instinctively sought refuge inside a church building. Always, despair was the mother of prayer.

Add to that the social injustices that have often resulted from these natural disasters, such as wars, recurring famines, economic exploitation, and it's easy to see that the overwhelming majority of people, the common people, lived a precarious existence, continually haunted by the specter of doom and disaster. The result was that some lived in almost constant terror of whatever unknown and certain doom hung over them, while others sought their refuge and hope in

an almighty God who could deliver them from the caprices of nature and from the social and economic disparities caused by their fellow man. That's why so many people, in what seems like centuries ago, lived so close to God. It explains why there were so many days of thanksgiving and days of prayer, not only in private life but in the public sector as well.

Of course, true religion is not merely the result of need or despair. It results from the working of the Holy Spirit. And the secret communion with God, originating in the special inspiration of God's Spirit in His elect, is just as much present now as it was in the days of our spiritual forebears. Let's not forget, however, that religion has two dimensions. One is the personal and is comparable to the creative arts insofar both religion and the creative arts are the result of personal inspiration. But that is only the first dimension, one in which religion shows its profound, pure meaning. In addition to that, or rather around it, is a second, much more extensive dimension which, while not brought to bear directly on the soul, is nevertheless indispensable to the survival of the first dimension. This broad, second dimension of religion is much more contingent on the external of life. It is, in a sense, the outer court to the inner sanctuary. And since this external or outer dimension of religion is related only indirectly to spiritual sensitivity and the concentration of the image of God – therefore also feelings of guilt and awareness of sin – it is motivated much more by a feeling of dependency, or the need for deliverance from the common ordeals of life, or the moral impact religion has on people, families and society as a whole.

While the first dimension, the inner sanctuary, maintains its own character and dynamic through all kinds of different circumstances, the second dimension, comparable to the outer court, fluctuates in intensity according to external need. In other words, without despair, there's not much prayer. People who participate constantly in the first dimension pray irrespective of need; those for whom religion is only a show, tend to pray only when the need arises and will forget about it the moment the danger has passed.

The effects of this are clear. Among the faithful, religion has always remained a living power. And regardless of man's progress and his conquest of nature, the intimate, spiritual mystery of religion remained the prime mover among the small circle of faithful. To them religion was walking with God, entering his sacred communion with God. Elsewhere, things turned out differently. People prayed only when the need arose. That's still the case. As the power of man escalates and his control over nature increases, there is a declining demand for prayer. As man

comes of age, his adolescent<sup>6</sup> need for dependency decreases. In the end, who needs God? An occasional disaster of great magnitude, such as the Second World War, may briefly restore man's feeling of dependency, but it soon vanishes. There is no longer an ongoing feeling of dependency to call in the help of the Almighty. For the most part, man can fend for himself.

Nor is this decline confined to people of the world. The feeling of insignificance, of helplessness and dependency is an integrated, essential component of religion. You need only read the Psalms, the Prophets and the New Testament gospel as, for example, "????".<sup>7</sup>

You need only ask the most pious believers and they will all tell you that their most compelling reason for turning to God was their own feeling of complete dependency on God. It seems that this dependency precedes anything else, like the child who is motivated almost completely by a sense of dependency, the need for security.

Nearly always, necessity comes first, followed only later by the development of spiritual awareness.<sup>8</sup> And though the deepening of spiritual awareness may later become the prime mover in the life of a Christian, the thing that triggered his growth was his feeling of dependency, his need for security. That need for security may in fact remain determinative until later in life, until finally the inner sanctuary is opened to God's holy presence and the Holy Spirit actually takes control. Even then, the need for security, such as an escape from the perils of life, economic disaster, concern for the future, remains a powerful dynamic. But then one's need for security and the Holy Spirit work together in the heart of the believer. Then the need for security also leads to discovery of sin. And exposed sin in turn reaches out to grace. That's how the need for security, deliverance, and the feeling of ultimate dependency lead the soul ever closer to God. In other words, even those who progress from the outer court into the inner sanctuary never become estranged from the conditions in the outer court. In fact, those conditions are essential to life in the inner sanctuary.

Now then, God's church is not just a community of people who have all discovered the first dimension. It will always remain a body made up of some

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<sup>6</sup>Is Kuyper serious in calling the need for dependency "adolescent?" See next paragraph.

<sup>7</sup>See footnote 3.

<sup>8</sup>I wonder whether in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the prime mover might not be the search for meaning, at least in the West.

who have penetrated into the first dimension, while others never reach out from life in the second dimension into the first.

That's why, once nature had been conquered and life made more predictable, God's church also changed. Not only the youth but also, though to a lesser extent, the older and more devout members of the church were deeply affected by the decrease in dependency which accompanied man's conquest of nature. If this were the sixteenth century, the religious atmosphere would be completely different. The same is true in reverse. Had they lived during our time, their religious life would undoubtedly have been much weaker than it was. Man will always remain just that.

To explain the difference between religious awareness and devotion, then and now, we have to look to external conditions that influence people through the centuries. It would be unfair to attribute today's adverse conditions to man's malevolence and suggest that people in ages past must have been more pious and faithful. The difference, for the most part, is the enormous victory man has scored over the forces of nature, a victory that resulted in the decline of man's feeling of insecurity and need for dependency. In many ways, that victory had a crushing impact on the way people live and what they believe. It would be prejudicial and unfair in the extreme if we, who still adhere to the faith of our fathers, condemned our contemporaries as malevolent because they show such little religious sensitivity. As well, it would preempt any attempt on our part to reach them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Basically, opposition to religion is indeed a malevolence that resides in the soul, but that malevolence resides in the soul of the believer as well as in the unbeliever. It was also present in previous generations. The question is what effect changing external conditions have on this innate malevolence, and whether they temporize or promote such malevolence.

Of course, the fact that man's power over nature has increased and the fact that scientific and technological discoveries have altered people's worldview immensely, is undeniable. And these major scientific and technological changes have precipitated a change in the nature of religion. As man's power grew, his sense of insecurity decreased. The immense power of nature, formerly seen as a deity personified, has largely been vanquished by man's accumulated knowledge and technological prowess. Man is now in a position to manipulate the erstwhile deity, Mother Nature. Mother Nature has become man's servant girl. Mother Nature's aura of invincibility is gone. The capricious power of nature which used to present man with innumerable crises has now been brought in check. This is

accepted by both believers and unbelievers. The light of knowledge and science has dispelled the shadows of the past, the Dark Ages. We know things our ancestors would not have guessed at. The microscope reveals secrets never seen before. Distances are measured in terms of hours and minutes, rather than in weeks and months. The means of communication with all the different parts of the world have proliferated.<sup>9</sup> Monstrous dams hold in check the most powerful of rivers and harness the potential energy in them. Man's horizons are receding, his possibilities multiplying by the day. How can those, unwilling ever to recognize God's grace in their lives, be expected to feel just as dependent, just as insecure, as previous generations who had none of the advantages of modern science and technology? Once man's progress was accelerated by key scientific discoveries, the feeling of profound dependency which, admittedly, had never really been more than a fear of disaster, quickly vanished and was replaced by a feeling of confident self-sufficiency and autonomy.

But lest we think that this was limited only to unbelievers or nominal Christians who were otherwise indifferent to the total scope of religion, let me hasten to add that the circle of believers was also seriously impaired by the advances in man's scientific and technological know-how. This was especially true in the case of those believers whose religious awareness was based solely on their need for security. But even those Christians who had a much more profound religious sensing, whose religious awareness penetrated into the inner sanctuary, were deeply affected by the external changes brought about through the advent of science. You only need read the personal testimonies of Christians who lived centuries ago and compare their awareness with your own in order to conclude that the element of awe and even mystique with respect to the elements of nature used to play a much larger role in the total religious life of man. And it is by and large the demythologizing of nature, resulting from the advances in science, which spells the difference between the way we experience dependency and the way our forebears experienced it.

This also explains why the decline of religious energy is a universal phenomenon that plagues all people, whether Christians or Jews or, to a lesser extent, the followers of Islam.

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<sup>9</sup>See footnote 2.

## **Chapter 6**

There is no rest day or night.

Revelation 14:11

Total control over nature has provided man with a tremendous incentive. His dependency and need for security decline relative to his scientific progress. Predictably, it resulted in stagnation of the religious life. It restricted the scope of piety. It decreased the energy levels of devotion.

All these effects together contributed to religious decline and the general mushrooming of unbelief. And yet, man's triumphs over the power of nature are not the sole cause for religious stagnation. There was at least one other effect of progress that severely crippled religious awareness. I'm thinking about the general loss of rest and serenity which formally provided ideal conditions for the growth of piety and devotion.

Of those who worship the beast and his image, the book of Revelation states: "There is no rest, day or night." This in contrast to the beautiful promise: "Rest will remain for the people of God." Repeatedly God's Word refers our tormented

and terrorized heart to the precious gift of rest. The Lord's Day regularly brings to us a day of rest, a day of serenity (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5).

It seemed to the writer of Proverbs a thing to be desired. And Ecclesiastes writes:  
....<sup>10</sup>

In the Song of the Good Shepherd the Psalmist writes:

“He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
He leads me beside quiet waters.” (Psalm 23).

And, concerning Lamentations for the city of Jerusalem....

Moreover, in the book of Jeremiah, Baruch complains: ....

In his many travels, Paul of Tarsus also sorely regretted not having any rest for his body and soul (II Corinthians 2:12; *cf.* II Corinthians 7:5) And long ago Isaiah wrote: “This is the resting place; let the weary rest,” and “This is the place of repose” where our peace came to us through Christ, which is why he could say....

Not all these instances of rest are of the same kind. The most profound rest is the one that delivers our hearts from our violent passions and brings us peace with God. After that comes the type of rest that delivers us from hostility and injustice from our fellow man. There is also rest from a seemingly inescapable doom, whether it's persecution by powerful enemies or the grievous disappointment and sorrow of illness or death. There is also the rest that restores peace to our hearts and delivers us from doubt; it brings sanity, perspective and hope back into our thinking and experiencing. But taken altogether these are still types of rest that are related to our life here on earth; the final, ultimate rest will be given us upon arrival in the Father's house, once the eternal Lord's Day has begun.

And always when storms rage, when restlessness, anxiety and stress overwhelm us, the Christian yearns for rest, for peace and serenity. The most extreme and terrifying example are those who are mentally ill, the person who, compelled by his psychosis, sees no way out of his despair and kills himself. But even the average man, moderate though he may appear, is torn apart by anxiety and strife and by a profound and irresistible yearning to find a measure of peace.

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<sup>10</sup> For this and the next few ellipses, see footnote 3. Kuyper would often use his own translations in the Dutch of 1900, which is often difficult to trace in standard English Bible versions

After the day comes the night when the light is taken away and lengthening shadows rush across the countryside until all is wrapped in darkness. And with the night and the darkness, into which human life seems to vanish, come the hours of rest and sleep. It is a rhythmic, repetitious course of events through which God grants the favor of rest to mankind. Once the eyes are closed and the limbs relaxed, the haggard human spirit succumbs to much-needed sleep. Sleep covers up to one-third of our lifetime. A person of ninety will have spent almost thirty years of it in sleep, a sleep of renewal, of reinvigoration and restoration of energies spent. Insofar even the grave offers rest, it has a certain appeal. Hence, "rest in peace." Even that inscription reflects the subtle yearning of the human heart for a peace that will, at last, not be disturbed. Rest for our conscience, resting from our sins, from our labors, a respite even from human relationships, both good and bad, the end of a tiresome and troublesome existence.

The opportunity to enjoy periods of rest is indispensable for the growth and maturation of our faith life. The primary purpose of the hermit and the monk and all those who withdrew from human society, whatever their sins and misconceptions, was to seek the quiet communion with God in prayer. It was an attempt, while still in the world, to sacrifice whatever was of the world in order to gain the quality of eternal rest, rest for one's soul. Though never inclined to monasteries, the Protestants, with their motto "Alone in communion with God," showed that they also yearned for the quiet and solitude necessary for a budding and maturing faith.

For that reason, the countryside always proved to be a haven for religiously sensitive people, much more so than the larger cities with their hectic, almost frantic activity. But whether in the countryside or in the city, the Lord's Day always brought welcome relief from the busy pace of life and certainly Sunday was preeminently the day for religion.

I don't mean that devotion and piety cannot thrive in the midst of city life. There's lots of proof to the contrary. But then the piety is the result of the intense polarity between reality and the irresistible urge for rest and peace. True, religious awareness and expression need not be crushed by the hyperactivity of our modern existence but for the most part, piety and devotion are best stimulated by a restful, peaceful surrounding.

If we keep in mind the world as it is today and the dominant worldview as articulated in the progress of man and man's prowess over nature, it is easy to

see why religious awareness has been steadily declining. I'm not talking about serious-minded Christians. Their minds are activated by the overriding work of the Holy Spirit which ultimately is irresistible. But those serious-minded Christians share in the life of the first dimension, the inner sanctuary, and I'm talking about the overwhelming majority of the people who have never progressed beyond the second dimension, the outer court. And while in centuries past this overwhelming majority was also deeply affected by religion, it has now by and large been alienated from any religious awareness. But we must show some understanding and compassion for these people, even though we may be tempted to judge them harshly for their lack of religious sensitivity.

What actually is the difference between then and now? What else but that the serenity and peace of centuries past, prior to the advent of science and technology, has been replaced by acute hyperactivity and anxiety. Incidents of mental illness are increasing by leaps and bounds. Suicides are more numerous every year. There is anxiety in people's thinking, anxiety in their behavior, anxiety both at home and at work. Everything has to be done at a frantic pace; there is little time to relax. It seems that our nerves are constantly on edge and our hearts are continually racing. Of all the factors influencing our lives today, stress is probably the most prominent and pervasive.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>I suspect the translator once again what is described in footnote 2. This paper ends abruptly. It seems the translation is incomplete. In spite of its imperfections, the article shares a lot of Kuyper's thought with the reader, which is the purpose of this website page.