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## Christian faith and economic life: some Kuyperian themes

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This article argues that the legacy of the nineteenth-century Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper merits renewed attention for the light it sheds on some topical economic issues of our time. Kuyper's life and work (1837-1920) had a marked influence on the Dutch societal landscape and beyond, well into the twentieth century. He proposed an understanding of Biblical belief entailing an across-the-board understanding of how believers should live, with comprehensive and far-reaching effects. This study traces the implications of Kuyper's views on faith and public life and his conception of sphere sovereignty, as well as the application of these ideas to the role of markets and governments and to economic development.

### Christelike geloof en ekonomiese lewe: enkele Kuyper-temas

Hierdie artikel betoog dat die nalatenskap van die negentiende-eeuse Nederlandse staatsman en teoloog Abraham Kuyper hernieuë aandag verdien vanweë die lig wat dit werp op netelige ekonomiese kwessies vandag. Die impak van Kuyper se lewe en werk (1837-1920) was omvattend binne en buite Nederland en het tot diep in die twintigste eeu geduur. Sy lewenstaak was om 'n begrip van Bybelse geloof te verkondig wat die lewensomspannende betekenis daarvan aan gelowiges verduidelik, asook hoe hulle met 'n omvattende en verreikende uitwerking daaruit kan leef. Hierdie bydrae spoor die implikasies na van Kuyper se siening oor geloof en die openbare lewe, sy konsep van soewereiniteit in eie kring, asook die toepassing van voorgaande op die rol van markte en die owerheid en in ekonomiese ontwikkeling.

We live in a time when the cut-and-thrust of economic life, on both the domestic and the international level, constitutes the dominant ethos.<sup>1</sup> Issues such as corporate malfeasance, the growing and uncertain impact of globalisation, and the unsettling changes in the context of employment, have made questions about the directives or guidelines (if any) for these and other areas of societal functioning particularly pointed. Could it be that the legacy and influence of the nineteenth-century Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper merits new attention for the light it may shed on some topical issues of our day? This study intends to argue that this is indeed the case.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a remarkably versatile and multi-talented person who played prominent roles in Dutch society, *inter alia* as a pastor, theologian, newspaper editor, educationalist, politician, and even a prime minister. One of the major enduring outcomes of his work was the founding of the Free University of Amsterdam, established in 1880. The centennial of Kuyper's Stone Lectures, presented at Princeton University in the USA in 1898, has recently given rise to an incisive revisiting of his thought and influence (cf for example Bratt 1998, Lugo 2000). In publications and other fora, Kuyper's life and work have been thoroughly reviewed and discussed. This contribution will not, therefore, provide another extensive overview of Kuyper's ideas or of notions derived from his work since his time.

More than his intellectual (or academic) contributions, Kuyper's life and work had a remarkable impact on the political, social and educational landscape of the Netherlands, continuing well into the twentieth century, while his writings shaped a school of thought (Kuyperianism and later Dutch neo-Calvinism) with widespread appeal — not only in the Netherlands, but also in Europe and North America. Kuyper was a prophet of the first order, calling society as a whole, to a radical vision of faithfulness to its Creator. For Kuyper the word "Calvinism" referred to an understanding of Biblical belief entailing an across-the-board understanding of how believers should conduct their lives, with comprehensive and far-reaching effects. Like paganism, Islam,

1 Expanded version of a presentation first delivered at the Second Abraham Kuyper Consultation on "Theology and economic life: exploring hidden links", March 22, 2003, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton.

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Roman Catholicism and modernism, it offers humanity a set of options regarding life's three fundamental questions: How does an individual relate to God, to other people, and to the world? (Kuyper 1931: 31).

Proceeding from a powerful and very active involvement in practical societal life, Kuyper's thought was not always consistent or devoid of error and misunderstanding. An often mentioned (but not central) example is his latent demeaning contention that the physical co-mingling of different peoples is necessary for the growth of more developed forms of human life — an idea that was not intended to serve as a basis for racial domination, but was nonetheless open to serious misuse.

Unlike Marx or Keynes, Kuyper's intellectual work has fortunately not given rise to various contesting interpretations as to its meaning or how the author should be understood. The single thrust of his entire life and work is clear and unambiguous. He wanted to show that life in its entirety can only be understood and lived in the service of either God the Creator or a god of some human making. For Kuyper this did not mean a theocracy, or the church ruling societal life. Instead, it referred to the humble and careful quest to understand and obey God's intentions for every form of human existence, which serve as creational norms or directives for the functioning of our world. This led Kuyper and his supporters to establish sovereign parent-governed Christian schools, a Christian university free of both state and church control, and a political party which was not subservient to the wishes of a church's bureaucracy, but strove to find and obey the will of God in the political sphere. In this he stood squarely behind the Christian thinking of Calvin and others since the Reformation.

Kuyper did not give any substantial exposition of his ideas on economics as such, other than what was included in his lectures on Calvinism at Princeton, or in his address on "The social question and Christian religion" at the opening of the Christian Social Congress in Amsterdam in 1891. The thoughts he expressed on these matters were also mainly concerned with the deeper philosophical thrust underlying the political economy of his day or, when more direct, woven into his many shorter pamphlets, practical newspaper contributions and political speeches.<sup>2</sup>

2 A fairly extensive list of Kuyper's publications in Dutch may be found in Augustijn *et al* 1987: 256-9).

The aim of this paper is not to mine these sources for a historical (re)construction of Kuyper's views on specific economic themes. Its more modest intention is to explore a number of central themes of "Kuyperian thinking" — particularly on societal structures and their interrelationship — and to highlight their relevance to economic life today.

It must also be acknowledged that the practical implications of Kuyper's thought on societal life (including economics) are not viewed by adherents of his central message in a uniform way. These differences will not be examined in this contribution. The reading given here may be described as a progressive one.

## 1. Christian faith and public life

### 1.1 An ethical issue?

When the issue of evaluative guidelines or criteria for cultural life (in its broadest sense), or for the various dimensions of societal life, surfaces in public discussion, the discourse generally turns to the question of ethics — theological or otherwise. This reflects the need for deeper grounds for ordering public life. Current global concerns about inroads into the twenty-first century, as well as the tide of political choice in the USA, have once more forced this issue into prominence.

Christianity has been both praised and vilified for its contribution to society. Kuyper's role in the Netherlands is a powerful example of how Christian belief can be brought to bear on societal life in a very constructive manner — one that explicitly intends to make room for true societal pluralism, rather than religious sectarianism or exclusivity. From this perspective (particularly in its twentieth-century form), some comments are needed on the meaning of a comprehensively Christian approach to abiding guidelines or norms in public life. It will be argued that some important differences exist between what may be termed a "Kuyperian" position, on the one hand, and an "ethical" position, on the other.

The notion of norms with an origin outside human intellectual construction — implying God-given directions and limits to human conduct — has steadily lost credence in Western societies since the Enlightenment. This is closely linked with the decreasing influence of in-

stitutional churches. The public domain has thus become impoverished from a moral point of view while juridical procedures have eventually come to provide a minimal moral response, referring mostly to the need for tolerance and respect.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the role of prescriptive (theological) ethics has also receded. Traditional moral authorities (churches, parents and teachers) have steadily lost influence and been replaced by other contemporary moral frames of reference — television and the internet being the main sources today. The trustworthiness of applying general rules or abstract principles to concrete societal issues has thus consistently lost currency.

But since it is impossible to live meaningfully without any directional principles, the need for some form of personal and public normative appeal (or moral compass) has remained — historically filled by resorting to what is called “values”. Without digressing into a philosophical or semantic discussion of the term “values”, it may be said that broaching values in public discourse has come to be regarded as the only effective way to introduce ethical or broader normative considerations. A typical example is the present call in many parts of the world for the rediscovery and restoration of communal (“family”) values and norms, but not in such a way that human self-sufficiency is questioned. Yet, Western societies still entertain a powerful resentment against the rehabilitation of obligatory morality in public life. There is a wide mistrust, especially among intellectuals and in the media, of civic morality or communally shared values and norms.

In what ways are values introduced into public discourse, now that they have lost their former authority? In the spirit of the Enlightenment, values have come to be regarded as rational and self-generated human directional choices, rather than of supra-human origin, mediated by the church. This, of course, means that values — as directives — are increasingly being seen as subjective and ultimately completely relative.

Although all normative discourse is inherently ambiguous and provisional, the Enlightenment position implies a view of norms and values that in principle denies them any general or universal significance or

3 For a more incisive development of the rise of human rights and “social capital” in public discourse and action, a topic that will not be pursued here, cf Balkenende *et al* 1997, Van der Vyver 2002.

consequence. The potential direction-giving impact of norms and values in the public sphere then becomes effectively limited to those (often a minority) who accept them as valid. In a utilitarian sense, this makes values operative only to the degree that people deem them to be in their own interest or relevant to the pursuit of their goals. Such a stance patently diminishes the power that recourse to values can have in influencing public life, often practically relativising them into irrelevance.

It may be argued that from a Christian point of view, values need not be understood in the limited sense outlined above. Christian believers choose to live by directives (norms or values) that they regard as both abiding and binding in a supra-individual and supra-temporal sense. Furthermore, in Christian circles in general, the ultimate basis of what are called “values” is the Bible. Since theology is regarded as the field of inquiry that intends to explicate the message of Scripture, theological ethics thus becomes the primary way in which the Biblical message is made relevant and applicable to public life in general. The intent of this approach must be wholeheartedly applauded by all believers. A basic part of the believer’s task is precisely to resist the relegation of “religion” to the pasture of privacy, and to oppose the assertion that secular thinking is the only mode of discourse for the public realm.

From a Kuyperian view, however, a serious problem arises with the conventional theological or ecclesiastical position on ethics for public life. If we need to “speak” our view of what norms hold for any aspect of life — such as business enterprises — via theological ethics, or through the proclamations of church bodies only, do we then not accept that human understanding of the inner workings of a business enterprise, for example, is basically neutral or amoral? Do we not implicitly accept the old (and now seriously contested) bifurcation of values and facts, or, to put it differently, the notion of a sphere where values have currency and others where only practical effectiveness counts? Can one refute the criticism that theological ethicists are (generally) insufficiently informed to deal with the internal issues and choices within any specific field of human action, for example economics? If ethics is the defined province of investigating normativity, do we then have a strong enough argument against the dismissal of normativity *per se* as irrelevant to the inner way we set up our societal institutions, including those belonging to the economic domain?

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This is not a criticism of ethicists or of ethics *per se*. By and large, this is the way people have been trying to deal meaningfully with the profound problem of normative anomie in our general understanding and use of knowledge since the eighteenth century. And to the extent that this endeavour has provided positive results (which it clearly has) it can only be lauded. The questioning of an “ethical” approach is examined here in order to contrast it with the approach that connects Christian faith with the fullness of life, of which Kuyper was such a powerful exponent. This view of normativity now merits some further general discussion.

## 1.2 If not ethics, then what?

If non-ecclesiastical discourse on norms among Christians — including how Biblical belief can shape views on culture and society — needs a broader basis than merely the (ethical) teachings and pronouncements of church leaders and bodies, how does this relate to theology and theological ethics? Kuyperian thinking contends that the legacy of the Reformation extends far beyond the walls of the church or theology (cf Kuyper 1912, Heslam 1998).

Kuyperian thought is not just Reformed, it is Reformational. In its theological dimension, Reformed thought tends to emphasise the reformation and integrity of the church. In a Reformational approach to belief and action, the basis of sound doctrine is used to inform and encourage believers about the reformation of all areas of life (cf Woldring & Kuiper 1980: 19-66, Melleby 2004). This takes the ideas of the Protestant Reformation beyond theology and abstract debates about the nature of atonement (particularly predestination) and church life, and rather seeks to bring about Christian cultural change and social transformation. However, serious lasting change can only come about after an incisive and radical re-formation of the basic philosophical and direction-giving assumptions influencing the inner structures of each sphere of culture (cf Wolters 1990).

A Kuyperian approach to normativity in societal life, including economic activity, also needs to be seen against the background of the more general convictions (or Biblical beliefs) on which it is built. In the most basic terms this means that life on earth (including the possibilities for organising societal structures) is a result of God’s creation. Creation constitutes the ordering principle, or point of coherence, from which

and through which all of our existence derives its meaning. In his Stone lectures at Princeton, Kuyper (1931: 70) expressed this as follows:

What now does the Calvinist mean by his faith in the ordinances of God? Nothing less than the firmly rooted conviction that all life has first been in the thoughts of God, before it came to be realized in Creation. Hence all created life necessarily bears in itself a law for its existence instituted by God Himself.

This fundamental idea comes to us as a revelation from God's hand in Scripture and nature. What it reveals is God's normative good order and will for our lives. From a Reformational perspective, the Bible is not seen as basically and merely containing stories and anecdotes that can bring individual salvation, solve personal problems, or provide sets of distinct moral statements about some aspects of human life. Instead, the Bible is the true story of what God has really done in history. It is a true account of how God works and what God wants done on earth (cf Seerveld 1995).

Often the Bible is read as if it were merely a mosaic of small, unconnected parts — theological, moral, historico-critical, pastoral and devotional. But from a Kuyperian understanding, a fragmented reading of the Bible ignores its divine author's intention: to shape all of our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If the Bible is understood in a fragmented fashion, its message is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should (cf Bartholomew & Goheen 2004).

The emphasis on Creation is not just one among many, but for Kuyper the most fundamental expression of our human condition (Kuyper 1931: 24). All human beings therefore are in a covenant (and not a contract) with God and respond in all their actions in one way or another to God's revelation in creation and Scripture. This all-encompassing response, in its fullness, is what is understood by the saying in Kuyperian circles that "life is religion". But creation, in some unexplained but very real sense, has become flawed or broken — by what Scripture calls "sin". The basic meaning of sin is the directing (orientation) of human life away from the Creator towards something within creation. From a Biblical viewpoint this brokenness is not final or irreversible. It is countered in a radical sense



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through the redemption of life's original intention by the suffering of Christ. The implications of this well-known triad of beliefs were consistently and incisively pursued through all of Kuyper's life and work, including his pronouncements on aspects of economic life.

For Kuyperians some quite fundamental implications flow from the belief in life's created nature (cf Vander Goot 1981). The first is that nothing in reality should be viewed as self-contained or self-sufficient. This undercuts all sacred/secular distinctions and approaches. There is no normal, natural course of events (deterministically or indeterministically conceived) which God occasionally has to interrupt or break into via spiritual acts of grace.

Secondly, creation is not a chaos or a void that we as human beings have to fill with meaning. It is a structured and eschatologically directed whole in which humans are at home, facing the possibilities which they are called upon to develop, cultivate and preserve.

Thirdly, God's will for creation and its inherent possibilities for life are given in what we understand as laws, principles and ordinances (Kuyper 1880: 40-53). These hold for all of reality and undergird it, although human beings have only partial and limited insight into what they are. Insight into the laws for human existence is not reserved for believers in God's creation, but available to all, whether their created origin is accepted or not. Furthermore, when we speak of these givens, we can do so only by using our flawed human formulations — more or less accurate and tinged with changing insight over time. This relativises all work in science and society without causing it to fall into relativism, or to deny all structural features of our existence.

Fourthly, by its very nature, all human life is a response to God's revelation in Creation. Everything human beings do is directed to God or to some idol as a substitute. Among other things, this quite unavoidable thrust not only directs, but also divides human intellectual and scientific practice in many respects, implying that the latter is not and cannot be neutral in a fundamental sense (Kuyper 1931: 110-41).

One very basic possible misunderstanding needs to be addressed at this stage. In Kuyperian thinking the notions above do not in any facile or simplistic way suggest that a belief in God and Scriptural revelation provides believers with exclusive formulae or recipes for practising "true"

science or living appropriately. Christians (of a Reformational or any other bent) have no automatically operating better insight into our world merely because they hold certain basic beliefs. As they are not free of limited insight or misunderstanding, they should invite and welcome criticism from within and beyond the Biblical tradition. Continual critical conversation with all others about their findings is therefore an essential part of their calling. Without abandoning their convictions, they can accept and celebrate various insights into our (created) existence provided by non-Christians, precisely because Creation holds for all.

It is very likely that much of the above will be shared, although expressed in different terms, by Christians of various denominations who would not describe themselves as “Kuyperian”. But the Kuyperian approach came into existence and persists precisely because it offers a viewpoint with quite radical consequences for a Christian response to contemporary science and culture (including economics), thereby accounting for substantial differences among Christians.

## 2. Sphere sovereignty and economic life

The idea of sphere sovereignty is clearly Kuyper’s most famous legacy. In his well-known opening address at the inauguration of the Free University of Amsterdam (1880) he used the idea to indicate that all forms (spheres) of purposeful organisation and action in societal life were endowed by the Creator with a definite and bounded field of functioning, and the accompanying authority to direct affairs in their particular “sphere”. In addition, each was uniquely characterised by an internal driving force that defined and delimited its function (Bratt 1998: 463-90; McConnel 2002).

In the later (1898) Stone lectures at Princeton, Kuyper (1931: 90) explained this as follows:

... that the family, the business, science, art and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the State, and which do not derive the law of their life from the superiority of the State, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority which rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the State does.

In his exposition of the idea of sphere sovereignty, Kuyper hardly dealt with questions that would typically be asked today, such as the definition of a sphere, or the precise relationship between spheres, or the

question of controlling sovereignty. The reason for this was the religious rather than political sense in which Kuyper generally used the term “sovereignty”. Fundamentally, he did not conceive of the term as primarily a defence of the right of the Church, the university or the family to manage its own affairs, based on some natural endowment with a protected set of in-house powers. This view of sphere sovereignty would have severed the idea from its roots for Kuyper. In using this term, he was not primarily concerned with civil or other rights, but with the order of creation. For Kuyper, “sovereignty” is authority, delegated to humanity by its Creator. Understood in this way, sovereignty has more to do with responsibility than with rights. Sovereignty is the vocation of the various spheres to follow the Creator’s original intention for their existence (cf Harinck 2002).

Kuyper wanted to restore the religious interpretation of sovereignty in the period following the French Revolution (Kuyper 1931: 85-8). Kuyper’s main objection to nineteenth-century thinking about politics and society was not that it had rejected the sovereign king or that sovereignty had been handed over to the people, but that it had effectively taken away the real freedom of the people by denying the religious roots of sovereignty, freedom, and justice (Kuyper 1991: 43-5).

Kuyper the activist was guilty, however, of periodically using the concept of sphere sovereignty in a more narrowly political or ideological sense as well — one that was intrinsically at odds with his deeper philosophical and religious use of the term. This occurred in particular when he defended the rights of Dutch confessional or political groupings against their opponents (cf Heslam 2002). The Dutch neo-Calvinist legal philosopher Dooyeweerd later highlighted and criticised this duality in Kuyper’s position (cf Dooyeweerd 1973).

For Kuyper, the timeless truth of God’s creational reign is upheld among human beings through the unfurling course of societal history. He saw human social structures and institutions as latent and dormant in Creation from the beginning, as possibilities to be actualised (cf Kuyper 1931). As human history unfolds and cultures develop, ever better ways are discovered to meet the organisational needs and challenges of more sophisticated communal life. Although the concrete forms (or spheres) of organised societal life therefore continue to change — giving rise to what we call history — the underlying possibilities for this unfolding

and growing sophistication are in essence unchanging. Kuyper saw these unchanging organisational principles and structures not as artificial human creations, but as given regulative guidelines for the evolving human cultural task on earth (cf Brink & Pennings 2004).

The idea of the “sovereignty” of each “sphere” metaphorically states its integrity and its inviolability in terms of other spheres. Although the immediate practical impact of the idea was to keep the state and the church in their proper places with regard to other societal formations (particularly the university), Kuyper’s deeper argument was that all spheres were intended to serve God’s created intent for our lives. This meant that they could not embark on any self-chosen imperial mission, but had to serve each other and life as a whole in the pursuit of their own mandates. Although Kuyper spoke of society as an organism, he did not get around to investigating and expounding the connecting principles between spheres within the societal order as a whole. For his purposes it was sufficient to emphasise that spheres are co-ordinated and linked in their functioning by virtue of their mutual relationship to the will of the Creator (Woldring & Kuiper 1980: 42).

A basic issue that follows concerns the intrinsic mission or task of each societal sphere and how dependable knowledge about this matter can be obtained. This is not the right moment to explore the complex topic of epistemology in this regard. Suffice it to say that Kuyper never elaborated on this issue in a systematic way.<sup>4</sup> Dutch neo-Calvinist philosophical thought in the twentieth century (Dooyeweerd and others) contributed extensively to answering this question in the expansion of Kuyper’s original thesis. For the purpose of this study, some important implications of the concept of sphere sovereignty, emanating from the critical expansion of Kuyper’s original ideas, will be explored in relation to economic themes of our time.

Arguably the most important implication of Kuyper’s thought is that the relationship between all institutions in society is characterised

4 Dekker (Augustijn *et al* 1987: 201) refers to the fact that among Reformational thinkers there has never been unanimity about what these tasks should be, let alone the possibility of ascertaining God’s intentions in this regard. The gradually increasing religious pluralism since Kuyper’s time has contributed strongly to discussion in this field.

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by a horizontal rather than a vertical social order (cf Woldring & Kuyper 1980). In this regard, Kuyper also distanced himself from the Catholic idea of subsidiarity, which emphasises a natural but vertical hierarchy of responsibilities in social life, whereas Kuyper suggested a more horizontal concept of social spheres, none of which had ultimate rule over others (Skillen & McCarthy 1991: 241). Thus no one dimension — economic, political, ecclesiastical or any other, can dominate or create the rules for the functioning of the rest of societal life. A further and correlated matter then becomes the way in which economic life in particular should constructively relate to the larger mosaic of our societal life. Of specific interest here is the perennial question relating to the role of the state in the economy.

As far as the latter issue is concerned, the danger of political overreach in the economy (and elsewhere) was consistently raised through much of the twentieth century (specifically after the second World War). The communist revolution in Russia and the practices of Stalinism contributed to this apprehension in no small way. The more activist Keynesian approach to economic policy-making in the post-war West after the second World War constituted another core issue in this debate. Towards the end of the twentieth century the communist project dissolved, and from the 1970s onwards (accelerated by the influence of the Thatcher and Reagan governments) the Keynesian approach has been steadily repressed in Western nations. The topical question today is where the new emphasis on free economic activity has left the world and how this can be evaluated from a Kuyperian perspective.

## 2.1 Economic activity and its relation to the rest of society

A Kuyperian view of economic life (building on Calvin) contrasts strongly with that of the early (second to sixth century) Christian church. The early view saw economic life as inherently sinful and therefore to be avoided or even negated. During the Middle Ages this view did not change fundamentally, but a minor role began to be allocated to economic pursuits, provided it was sanctified by the grace of the church. The Reformation (and Kuyper) saw socio-economic life as an enterprise to be neither negated nor sanctified. Instead, it became part of the human vocation as an integral part of God's good creation. As such, it became worthy of full development. But socio-economic life was never to become

self-sufficient or an end in itself, divorced from its purpose and destination of being an expression of solidarity among people under the guidance of the norm of stewardship (cf Haan 1984).

How does the relation of economic activity to other societal considerations and its importance in the Western world appear factually when viewed from this perspective? Broadly speaking, the course of affairs in the twentieth century demonstrates remarkably forceful swings of the pendulum in terms of the importance attached to economic activity *vis-à-vis* political (or government-directed) objectives and actions in particular.

The post-World War I decade of the 1920s was a rip-roaring binge, with unfettered economic freedom and material consumption as its hallmark. The role of government was simply not an important issue. This came to a jarring halt with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. Since government action was initially considered irrelevant, it seemed as if the only way out of the Depression was to wait for the deep economic doldrums to subside of their own accord. When it became apparent that this was unlikely, Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA and the theoretical arguments of the British economist Keynes introduced the idea that government action of a market-enhancing nature could save the day. After the end of World War II in 1945, the new era of Keynesian macro-economic management of market economies commenced. The pendulum swung away from letting the economy find its own way and the state became a major factor in how the economy functioned. For almost three decades Western nations experienced a period of sustained growth in production and rising standards of living.

From the 1970s onward, the Keynesian approach was questioned increasingly, as a result of the nagging inflation that unpredictably accompanied rising levels of unemployment. A further major development occurred when the USA stopped pegging the price of gold in dollar terms. The next decade and more saw disillusionment with government steering of market economies. When the Reagan and Thatcher governments came to power in the USA and Britain, respectively, the scenario changed substantially and the pendulum started to swing in the opposite direction. The slogan of "getting government off our backs" effectively gained appeal and the role of the state in steering and regulating Western economies diminished continuously. This constituted a significant reversal of the hold of political (and other non-economic) considerations on eco-

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conomic enterprise and decision-making during the latter part of the twentieth century. The swing to unfettered markets has to a certain degree been brought into dispute by events in Asia, Russia and South America in the late 1990s, but its thrust remains securely in place (cf Theil 2001, Stiglitz 2002).

With the lessening of government influence on the creation of money by financial institutions, following the severing of connections between the gold price and the *de facto* world currency status of the US\$, a further factor was introduced: the unprecedented rise in the amount of money and tradable financial instruments. This dramatic increase in financial derivatives to real capital over the last two decades has created a huge escalation in the hold of financial institutions and interests on the course of economic activity and the objectives of business.

Instead of political considerations and demands threatening to become the determining factor in society, as was argued in the 1970s, we now seem to be experiencing the overreaching, even complete dominance, of economic (particularly financial) considerations as the compass and measure of our lives. It should be obvious that neither this swing of the pendulum, nor the current state of affairs and its effects on the lives of those with little access to financial power would be celebrated in Kuyparian thinking. On the contrary.

In Kuyparian thought, economic activity has its own internal directive thrust — that of material provisioning in a non-wasteful way. Externally it should relate to other aspects of societal life in a caring, enabling and non-dominating way, without relinquishing its relative internal autonomy. The essential point about the economic dimension of our human existence is that it is no more than that: one dimension of our multi-dimensional human existence. Kuypers argued that in addition to our God-given impulse to explore, use and develop the potential of the natural world, God has granted us the right to do so, provided that it is done in such a manner that the rest of our lives may flourish (cf Kuypers 1991).<sup>5</sup> Failing to bear in mind the mutually supportive relation between economic and other aspects of our lives, we

5 Kuypers also dealt with these matters in various speeches and pamphlets, for instance *De Christus en de social noden* (Amsterdam, 1895) and *Democratische klippen* (Amsterdam, 1895), as referred to in Woldring & Kuiper 1980: 409.

run the almost inevitable danger of economising human life. That is: the danger, in our practice, of allowing the economic dimension to overwhelm all other dimensions, and in our theory, of thinking of and expressing human life as a whole in economic terms (cf Wolterstorff 2002).

A beneficial and mutually enabling relation between the economic and the other sides of life requires a structural principle. From a Kuyperean angle that principle is diversified responsibility. The responsibility called for in economic actions and institutions — as their contribution to a diversified and mutually enabling pattern of societal life — entails an orientation towards stewardship and solidarity. Stewardship implies that in controlling, using and preserving resources, we have no absolute disposition over them but should use them in compliance with what we contextually understand to be God's intention. The Kuyperean understanding of economic purpose has already been identified as material provisioning in a caring manner for the rest of our diversified forms of existence. This means that there is no room for wasting resources on national aggrandisement, purely personal whim, or limitless enrichment at the expense of others or of the natural environment. Solidarity refers to our orientation towards and caring for each other as humanbeings. We were not meant to be isolated individuals relentlessly pursuing our own individual good, but rather to find our destination and fulfilment by being orientated towards each other (Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA 1990: 20-7). It needs no special argument to show that, with singular exceptions, today's world is characterised by the absence of these motives.

Attention needs to be drawn to a particularly problematic aspect of the evolution of current economic life: the unqualified and far-reaching monetarisation of all economic decision-making. Although modern economics was served very positively by the introduction of money and financial intermediation in trade, we are now witnessing the overturning of the relationship between the real and the nominal (or monetary) sides of economic action. The basis of current economics demonstrates a decisive shift towards the internal dynamics and requirements of the financial side of economic activity. Financial activity, through the extensive and sophisticated variety of financial markets and securities trading, has acquired a life of its own — one that overshadows the monetary value of real activity by an amazing ratio. Real activity, which provides



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us with our material livelihoods, seems to have become a shrinking addendum to monetary activity. Money should contribute to an economy that serves people. Instead, we have allowed it to become an instrument for the control of people and their livelihoods. This is an obvious twisting of created relations and one for which we are paying dearly.

Some of the problematic effects of this are showing up in the almost paradoxical nature of well-known societal concerns. In considering unemployment in the rich countries of the world, we witness the phenomenon of a persistent (even increasing) lack of meaningful employment opportunities existing side-by-side with a shortage of workers in important fields like the caring professions. In the midst of growing affluence, poverty persists in rich countries such as Britain, the USA and Canada, not to mention the growing world-wide gap between rich and poor countries and nations. As far as the quality of life is concerned, it seems that despite working longer and harder, and increasingly participating in a 24/7 world economy, we have less and less time to live — a commodity which is ironically referred to as “free” time.

In the realm of enterprise, financial markets have come to value businesses less and less in terms of the contribution to our well-being of the goods and services they produce. Instead, their value is increasingly determined by how much they contribute to the financial gain of shareholders. Quarterly accounting figures have become the all-important indicator of “success”. An announcement of solid earnings growth for shareholders, far too often obtained through massive lay-offs, is hailed as sound performance. It can be argued that such financial indicators can be seen as proxies of “doing the right thing”, *ie* delivering what customers need and providing livelihoods for workers. But is the latter still the main concern of these indicators?

The issue here is the directive thrust for real economic activity that proceeds from single-minded attention to financial outcomes for shareholders. Despite talk of solid economic “fundamentals” we should not be surprised by the increasing vulnerability and capriciousness of what is seen as the health of modern economies, brought about by sudden and dramatic turn-arounds in financial markets. How could the vulnerable majority of people in South-East Asia or South America or Russia during the late 1990s simply accept the impact of purely speculative, financially induced changes on their livelihoods as merely necessary corrections of over-exuberant markets?

Goudzwaard (cf Andringa & Goudzwaard 2003) proposed the image of a tunnel society to describe this situation. In a tunnel, movement is directed towards the light at its end. But first all must pass through a dark and narrow tube that requires certain strict behavioural patterns. Slow movers are not welcome. Everyone must accept the “air pollution” inside the tunnel and carefully obey the “traffic rules” in operation. Only when the other side is reached, will the travellers arrive at the desired destination. An even more powerful, though similar description of the thrust of modern economies came from the pen of Keynes (1970: 463) in the 1930s when he mused on economic possibilities for our grandchildren. Speaking about the affluence that the single-minded pursuit of continued economic growth would eventually bring to all, he envisaged what the blissful end result would enable us to do, but also what it would require to get there. It is worth quoting at some length:

I see us free, therefore, to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue — that avarice is a vice, that the extraction of usury is a misdemeanour, and the love of money is detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow. We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful [...]. But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least a hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair, for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still, for only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.

We are almost three-quarters of the way down the path Keynes foresaw in the 1930s. And where have we got to? Some have certainly come through the tunnel but at what cost? And what about those stuck inside with little or no room to move? It seems as if the gods Keynes referred to may have failed most of us.

## 2.2 The economic role of the state

The perennial and concrete issue of the state and the economy was the focus of significant attention in Kuyper's time and has not disappeared from the agenda since. One of the hallmarks of a Kuyperian vision in this regard is the choice of an alternative position that differs fundamentally from both the liberal and the socialist view. Although a free economy (which is not identical to an unfettered free-market economy) is clearly called for, the long-standing debate about markets versus government planning is seen

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as a false counter-posing of alternatives. Casting the state as akin to a military commander who brooks no argument, in opposition to the free individual seeking his/her own well-being exclusively via individualised market interaction with others, is like setting up a straw man that can easily be shot down. The issue is not intrinsically that of totalitarianism versus freedom (although it can factually be so in certain situations) (Kuyper 1880: 99-104 & 1931: 78-109). Furthermore, to speak of a mixed economy provides nothing more than a description of what actually exists. A more promising avenue of thinking from a Kuyperian perspective is to inquire about the nature and normative task of the state and the essential nature of markets.

The essential task of the state is that of constituting and upholding of a public legal order to bring about justice in the conflict of interests of citizens (Kuyper 1931: 97). The sense of justice conveyed and elaborated on in Scripture is an order of sound relations between God, persons and things (cf Ps 45: 4-8; Ps 75: 1-4). This means recognising and allowing each and every person, or other part of Creation, its rightful place in God's world. The theme of a rightful place appeals again to the idea of "spheres", each with its own distinctive function and contribution (Marshall 1989: 17). What is due to each person is what is needed to fulfil one's calling and vocation with enjoyment and humanity. A person informed by the legacy of Kuyper will also distinctly hear the Biblical theme of "each and every": God desires that each and every human being should flourish, and that we will co-operate in fulfilling that desire (cf Heslam 2002).

There will obviously be dispute and even conflict about the concrete implementation of the above — even among those who accept the basic idea. Despite this, there is an almost universal agreement that the institutions of the state and government have the task, via the public legal order, to provide and uphold the legal and constitutional conditions necessary for justice to come about. The essential point is that the mandate of government is different from the call to justice that each person has to obey in inter-individual relations. From a Kuyperian perspective, the state is charged with the responsibility to justly inter-relate the authority and areas of responsibility of all societal institutions without taking charge of the internal functioning of any non-state part of society. The justice referred to in this instance is public justice.<sup>6</sup>

6 Cf Chaplin (2004) for a discussion of the meaning and possible misunderstandings of a Reformational articulation of the concept of public justice.

How does the above connect the state to the economy? Fundamentally the state's focus should consistently be to mediate in the economy so as to bring about greater public justice. In our current economies we use market interaction mainly to organise and direct the economic decisions of millions. Contrary to popular parlance, markets are not institutions that "do things" or have a life of their own. Instead they are arrangements for the meeting of human trading participants who use them, wisely or unwisely, for determining terms of trade (broadly conceived). Furthermore, the price and quantity outcomes of such negotiations do not in any way automatically represent economically (or otherwise) wise human decisions. From a Kuyperian viewpoint, there are major ancillary considerations (such as social, cultural and ecological issues) that those participating in market actions positively have to take into account before it can be said that market outcomes have served their best possible purpose.

The task of the state with regard to markets is firstly to ascertain to what degree their composition and functioning contribute to or detract from a just process through which people tend to their livelihoods. Instituting (where it is insufficiently established) or correcting the legal basis of market interaction is then its basic task. But markets require quite a substantial legal infrastructure if they are not to be merely a theatre in which the strongest rule. This, in turn, requires an extensive state jurisdiction and a relatively powerful and well-functioning state apparatus (cf Marshall 1989). The Kuyperian legacy is committed to the proposition that a fundamental condition of human flourishing in the modern world is that there be vitality in civil society (cf Algra *et al* 1964; Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA 1990: 106-35). For such vitality, the state must guarantee and respect the rights and duties inherent in the institutions of civil society (including business enterprises and markets) and, conversely, the various institutions of civil society must respect the right and duty of the state to secure the many forms and dimensions of justice.

Although such an approach has an extensive scope, it does not open the door for an all-providing or all-directing state. Governing should not consist of identifying all instances of societal ills and then proceeding to rectify them whatever it takes. Kuyper was dead set against state aggrandizement in all forms and from any ideological stance, whether

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of the left or the right (Kuyper 1931: 87-94). His position was not one that regarded the state as charged with the ultimate and encompassing responsibility for protecting and promoting the common good of the whole of society (Skillen & McCarthy 1991: 241). The Kuyperian position thus lends no support to either an ever-expanding (socialist or welfare) state that takes over the rightful role of free business enterprises and other economic relations, or a Fascist state that promotes the economic interests of the strong as part of the growth of national power. Incidentally, there is no support here for the standard liberal “neutral” or “hands-off” state with the night-watch role of merely keeping the contestants in life’s brutal struggle from robbing or killing each other, notwithstanding that it should be impartial and non-discriminating. Kuyper’s legacy provides a directive for state involvement in the economy that both directs and limits such involvement in principle (cf Marshall 1989).

The foregoing represents the easier part of the Kuyperian answer to the question of the nature of the state’s task regarding the economy. The more contentious issue is that of state provisioning of goods and services.<sup>7</sup> Standard economic theory has approached this issue via the idea of public goods, characterised by non-rival consumption and non-excludability. Referring to goods such as street lighting, roads and weather forecasting, a case can be made out that private action would not attend to these, making their provisioning a government task by default. But what if large numbers of people are caught in a situation where their access to what is materially required for a humane existence is constantly thwarted, despite their most diligent efforts to provide for themselves? What if even their access to the means for their own provisioning is blocked, particularly by the misuse of economic power? It can be argued that setting legal (and other) conditions right for market interaction will in time alleviate these situations, thus again limiting the state’s task to the basic legal type of action. In the long run, the latter may therefore be all that is required. But, as Keynes reminded us, in the long run we are all dead.

The immediate poverty and destitution of millions in rich and poor countries today cries out for an effective response. This situation was

7 Cf Goudzwaard’s somewhat dated but very thorough exposition of a Kuyperian position on this issue (Algra *et al* 1964: 248-315).

also present when Kuyper delivered his well-known address to the first Social Congress in the Netherlands in 1891. Decrying the “illusion of a right to dispose of one’s property, as if one were God, without considering the needs of others” (Kuyper 1992: 67), he then proceeded to argue:

[A]s soon as there is any clash among the different spheres of life, where one trespasses on or violates the domain which by divine ordinance belongs to the other, then it is the God-given duty of government to uphold justice before arbitrariness, and to withstand, by the justice of God, the physical superiority of the stronger (Kuyper 1992: 71).

Admitting that Kuyper was strongly opposed to the social democrats of his day, and that he did not romantically idolise the poor, the deeper issue raised here is what (if any) restraint is required from government to curb the callous use of the superior position enjoyed by the strong in society. Could it not be argued that the need for immediate action can require government to undertake “non-typical” tasks, by assisting in meeting the material needs of the weak directly but temporarily — allowing them both the space and the means to become more self-reliant? Should the state not, for justice’s sake, withstand the overwhelming economic power of the strong in some situations and spend resources to enable the weaker to make do, or even (representing our human solidarity and responsibility for each other) provide lasting support for those who are prevented from effectively entering or re-entering the economic process?

Such questions land us squarely in the debate on whether the state is better equipped to do this than private (or non-state) institutions. Though this is largely an empirical debate, one should not lose sight of the ultimate requirement, namely that whatever means we choose to support the weak, the outcomes provide the true test of what has to be done. Government is responsible for ensuring that in whatever way assistance is provided to enable all to live up to their multi-faceted vocation (*ie* by itself or through non-governmental processes), the norm of justice is effectively brought into operation. A choice in favour of non-action on the basis of arguments for a “hands-off” or “limited” state in such a situation amounts to the state relinquishing its true task.

This brings us to the issue of the economic “size” of the state and the idea of a limited state. Today’s world is experiencing an unremitting drive for the reduction or privatisation and marketisation of most of the economic provisioning that was formerly undertaken by governments

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— a return to the idea of a limited state. Predominantly based on arguments for greater efficiency, there is a relentless impetus for wide-ranging (almost infinite) limitation of state participation in or regulation of the economy. The failure of the command economies of the twentieth century has added further grounds for this position. From a Kuyperian position, the harping on “government failure” and a “limited state” for drastic reduction of government influence and action in the economy is questionable if not misleading. The fundamental question is whether everything should become “for sale” (cf Kuttner 1998).

The argument for a limited state is also often cast in terms of first quantifying the government’s role in the economy, determining what part of its actions constitutes the total monetary value of economic activity. It is recommended that in a limited state this total should not exceed some approximate value, such as 25%. According to Kuyper’s understanding of the idea of sphere sovereignty, this approach would clearly be unfounded. The true limit of what the state should do in the economy is not provided by a quantified ceiling on the dimensions of its activities, but by the focus directing its involvement, as argued above. Thus it may transpire that a state with a small quantified level of participation is exceeding what it should be doing in the economy, because it is pursuing other purposes than establishing just relations. On the other hand, a state with a large quantified role may be directed in its decisions by what the pursuit of justice requires in a particular context. This is of course theoretical and does not supplant but complement the obvious point that governments in practice have to do the right thing in the right way, irrespective of the quantity of economic resources to which they lay claim for the purpose.

Although this has been discussed above, the point can also be made again here that the current “rolling back of the state” demonstrates the conventional view of how economic acts are seen to relate to the rest of life (or not). The tacit (or even explicit) underpinning of what is today called “market fundamentalism” is a belief in the assumedly neutral, if not mechanistic, functioning of markets by which society can effectively allow everyone’s material passions free rein without exploding into chaos or destroying too much. This belief leads to the abstract reasoning that people and institutions can only use resources wisely and maximise their economic well-being if they stick to what is

dictated by economic “rationality” — the uncompromising and single-minded pursuit of individual material interests. That such economic “rationality” overstates the relative importance of individual material advance to the detriment of non-individual and non-material dimensions of well-being can no longer be denied.

“Market fundamentalist” thinking absolves people and enterprises from responsibility for any non-economic (political, social, ecological or cultural) outcomes of their economic actions. Market interaction and the ensuing competition for the best material outcome for each participant are regarded as automatically taking care of other considerations, because non-economic conditions and impacts make themselves felt in the changing prices to which markets will respond. Government action is seen as inherently incapable of improving on the results of markets and generally, despite good intentions, making matters worse if it tries to enforce responsibility or mitigate the outcome of markets. Oft-quoted examples in this regard are price control or attempts to curb ecological damage.

In Kuyperian thinking, this is a denial of reality. It is granted that, historically, the unfettered individual pursuit of economic benefits has brought about marked improvements in standards of life. But merely to praise free economic enterprise for its bounty, without paying serious attention to its many and substantial negative results, is to deny that the coin has two sides. More basically, humanbeings are accountable to God and to each other for the results of their economic actions. To see economic outcomes as merely the effects of the good or bad functioning of the market as an impersonal mechanism is to effectively de-humanise economic life. Accountability is also decidedly not measurable merely in financial returns on capital invested. High financial returns, viewed in isolation, in no way indicate the social (or other) desirability of any project. As argued before, a holistic and multi-dimensional weighing of the interrelations between economic and other aspects of our lives should inform the way we account for the soundness or error of economic decisions. Collective action, mediated through governments, can and must assist in making apparent how well or badly we are doing.

The discussion above provides pointers to the potential contribution of Kuyper’s thought to determining the desired role of government (or better, collective action) in relation to individual economic initiative. When used to ponder the impact and consequences of the ongoing world-



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wide process of privatisation and marketisation, it provides ample reason for critical reflection. It asks basic questions as to whether economic justice and sufficient provisioning of material means for all, opportunity to participate meaningfully in the community of work, and care for the environment have been better achieved than before. If they have not, it points to where new approaches may be found.

### 3. The development of poor countries in the international economy

A final topic to consider is the international dimension of economic life, especially as it relates to the issue of the economic development of poorer countries and regions. Although Kuyper himself did not address issues such as these directly, they became important topics in Kuyperian thinking during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Despite various expansions and incisive deeper analyses (for instance Sen 1999), the economic development debate in mainstream circles centres on the issues of how economic growth (measured via the standard GDP per capita criterion) can be accelerated and what kind of growth will make the biggest and most rapid contribution to development (Theil 2001: 11-7). Of late this has been enhanced to identify the amelioration (if not the eradication) of poverty, in any number of its multiple dimensions, as the main goal of economic growth.

The assumption is that although development is not limited to economic matters alone, and it entails more than economic growth, the increase in GDP per capita is as good a proxy as one gets for improvement in all other dimensions of the quality of life in poor communities.<sup>8</sup> Non-economic considerations are seen here as either hindrances to or facilitators of economic growth. In essence, strategies for development

8 Although the ongoing debates about broader indicators for economic development (including the work of the UNDP on Human Development) demonstrate a substantial awareness and criticism of a simple identification of growth with development, the main international institutions and governmental initiatives for broader national development still maintain a basic adherence to the core developmental function of growth (cf Burnside & Dollar 2000; 2004; Rodrik 2001; 2005; Wolfensohn & Bourguignon 2004). See also the incisive overview of development thinking and practice by various authors in Thiel (2001).

have thus become economic growth strategies. Mainstream ideas about development strategy are founded on the distillation of the economic history of developed countries in today's terms. One example is Arthur Lewis's particularly influential theory that modern economic growth is brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation (cf Lewis 1955).

A Kuyperian response to the above starts by addressing the roots of the issue. Fundamental to this is to question whether the idea of modern economic growth as a proxy for development in its broader sense is warranted. The answer is negative. While in no way disparaging or dismissing the often necessary role of expanding economic production and productivity, the issue is to distinguish and seek the right relation between ends and means. Instead of seeing economic growth as a proxy (goal or end) for development, it must be determined how and in what sense appropriate growth can contribute as a means to the end of holistically understood human development. Whether it functions as an end or a goal, development as a condition is seen as indicating a state of being in which societies as a whole have achieved sufficient access to the full spectrum of economic and non-economic means to realise their potential and unfold their lives together, according to their own understanding of calling — an understanding that is holistic from its inception. Depending on how the expansion of economic outcomes (or economic growth) is pursued, it may either contribute to or inhibit human development. It is a matter of deliberate choice (Buijs 2003: 145-51).

This view of development sets out from the real and expressed needs of people, regarding development as essentially the development of human capabilities in order to live full lives in response to God-given possibilities. For this to be achieved, all members of a society must be enabled and empowered to make life choices to enhance their lives, allowing them to move away from conditions of capture by forces beyond their control — an idea also articulated by Sen (1999). For people to experience the unfolding of the variety of possibilities for meaningful living, culturally diverse ways of developing must be affirmed. The idea that there is one universally superior way of life — that of the rich part of the world — should therefore be rejected.

The historical process of economic change in the world since the nineteenth century (whether called development or not) has to be analysed and understood as the evolution of industrial capitalism. The evaluation

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of this history as the basic material for the mainstream understanding of development has been the subject of some incisive analysis from the Kuyperian side (cf Goudzwaard 1979). Goudzwaard traces the characteristics of capitalist development to a number of factors, the key one being the urge in western societies for continued economic and technical renewal during the modern era. This is justified by the moral directives of a utilitarian ethic which values human activities only in terms of their usefulness to the increasing acquisition of goods as the most important source of utility. Goudzwaard (1979: 33-5) finds the decisive motivation for the ceaseless pursuit of this renewal in humanity's faith in progress, a faith that he depicts as the aspiration of the post-Renaissance person to regain the lost earthly paradise referred to in medieval thought. The restless and unrelenting pursuit of earthly bliss via material consumption has obviously brought considerable material improvement for many. But it also has been accompanied by other legacies — legacies that are woven into the growth recipe of our time.

The most influential legacy of capitalist growth is the identification of development with the pursuit of the goal of material plenty, as argued above. While the setting of goals as a proximate indicator of where a process should be heading is not at fault, it becomes a problem when the goals become ends in themselves — one of the hallmarks of idolatry (cf Goudzwaard 1989). From a Kuyperian perspective the distinction between goals and norms is of great significance. The connotation of a norm, as a creational given to live by, is not that of an inflexible and exact rule for human action — one that can only be followed to the letter. Instead, it has the character of a compass or a beam of light that points or illuminates the direction of action in response to a God-given calling. It also implies that norms are not set rules that allow only one form of expression. Acting in response to norms always allows room for the context and circumstances in which these norms are to be applied, as well as for a certain flexibility. Because of this, normative sensitivity implies the necessity of continuous critical reconsideration, both when things seem to go right and when they go wrong.

Returning to development thinking, the critical reason for attempting to contribute to a new approach is the incontrovertible fact that despite the positive changes that have occurred in many poorer parts of the world since the end of the World War II, the gap between rich and poor

persists — and even widens — together with tenacious, grinding poverty and hunger in large sectors of humanity. After so many decades of “development”, this outcome is no longer merely a theme for intellectual investigation but a human disgrace, and clearly not just the result of the poor not doing the “right thing” or not working hard enough. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ideological use of economic growth, as the meaning and driving force of development, has taken over and distorted the regulating function of norms for the unfolding of better life opportunities for the poor.

It should be clear that single-minded growth promotion can and often does distort the process of improving the lives of the poor, when they are required to completely adjust their behaviour, their institutions and their policies to the dictates of modern economic growth, as prescribed by rich governments and international financial institutions. Instead of growth ensuing as the fruit of normatively responsible economic and other action, it becomes the funnel through which all action must be channelled and directed. What is obviously lacking is guidance as to the norms of improved livelihood for all, solidarity through participation and co-operation, and justice in access to means (cf Goudzwaard & De Lange 1994).

Up to this point the argument does not imply that all growth is negative, but that its ideological application as an objective (substituting as a norm) gives rise to more problems than solutions in dealing with poverty and destitution. It fails to recognise and address the conflict through which people, more often than not, have obtained what they are exchanging. Though the intention is denied, modern-day capitalist economic growth fuses the drive for power and control into the drive for capital as the way to escape from poverty (cf Meeks 1989). The persistent lack of real improvement on a broad front in poor countries, especially in Africa, is no surprise.

The implications of the thinking outlined above can contribute to efforts from other strains of thought in opening up some of the developmental deadlocks experienced by many nations and peoples. This Kuyperian thinking makes no claim to uniqueness or complete originality. What is intended is to add voice and reinforcement to calls for re-orientation in development policy and development co-operation — directed particularly, but not exclusively so, at those who engage in

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the broad field of development work from a Christian worldview (cf the contributions to Buijs 2003).

Without dismissing the reality and the positive potential of international links and co-operation, the way forward seems to require a re-discovery of the localisation of opportunity and responsibility for development. This presupposes the rediscovery and practical affirmation — by both national and international role-players and institutions — of basic norms for improvement in human conditions that apply to all nations in their work, culture and context (cf Goudzwaard & Van Baars 1978). Enabling people of all countries to gain effective control over their future and to become more self-reliant necessitates the absence of external policy dictates concerning the development of the economy, technology and culture. Effect should be given to the ability and freedom to develop according to one's own culture and one's own responsibility. The other side of the coin is that poorer nations and peoples should actively assume the responsibilities that they are obliged to bear for the sake of their own improvement.

A brief comment on the phenomenon of globalisation is appropriate at this stage. Initially, the term was a descriptive one, but it has turned into an economic prescription. The recurring refrain is that there is no alternative to its current form and practices. The current shape and patterns of globalisation are held up as the natural next phase of market-led economic growth. But current globalisation is no mere twist of historical fate or outcome of forces beyond anybody's control. Deliberate choices were made about issues such as increasing international trade on terms favouring the rich nations; the complete opening up of the borders of vulnerable nations to transnational enterprises; drastic cutbacks in public spending in conjunction with the rapid privatisation of public services in poor societies with little recourse to alternatives, and the lifting of restrictions on international financial flow that put small nations at the mercy of massive flows of international speculative money. The promise was held out that the combined effect of these steps would be to increase the wealth and general well-being of all nations much faster than hitherto. Everyone was supposed to benefit. But so far the results are clearly not in line with this ideal.

From a Kuyperian viewpoint, globalisation as a phenomenon of increasing connections and possibilities for co-operation between people

is welcomed as opening up more room for human beings to unfold what was given to us in God's creation (cf Goudzwaard *et al* 2001). At issue, as in so many other aspects of the economy, are two things: What has the current form of globalisation contributed in terms of the possibility of bearing personal and institutional responsibility for following one's vocation, and how are its advantages and disadvantages distributed across the world? Listening to the voices of ordinary people in many poor countries, we hear that they are experiencing a further loss of control over their options. For millions, the reconfiguration and further disempowerment of smaller and more vulnerable nations, the failing safeguards for human and ecological well-being, and the increasing power of the already powerful in trade and financial relations are giving rise to a growing sense of oppression, hopelessness and fixation in an already dire situation (cf Narayan 2000, Stiglitz 2002).

The legacy of Kuyper and others advocating his train of thought can be used to rethink and reform the important and rapidly unfolding globalisation of our time. This can introduce a very relevant and practical, mostly direction-giving, impetus for sustained improvement in the well-being of the world's less fortunate and help to chart new avenues for international economic co-operation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Kuyperian thought profoundly acknowledges that the uncovering of the rich diversity of God's intentions for the various aspects of our lives — including the economic — is never simple or static, and that it depends on the work of "interpretative communities". The provisional nature of the energetic efforts of such clusters of people, struggling to find ways forward for societal healing, is the hallmark of the cry for an ongoing Reformation. Their variety of responses will lead to different ways of understanding our earthly tasks that should be tested in continuous revision and debate. This does justice to the dynamic nature of our current societies and knowledge.

It also recognises that changing "realities" are not mere human experiences of a changing fate, but are dependent on the reliability of created and providential structural directives and laws. The existence of transcendental notions of order in our world is neither arbitrary nor

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relativistic. But these notions are relative in the sense of being related to the Creator. Because the created order is seen as constitutive for all, it provides the freedom and space for the faithful to work with people from various traditions and faith perspectives to make the world a good and lasting home for all.

In a world that manifests itself in both the splendid accomplishments and the brokenness of human endeavour, healing economic and other work is only modestly present. However, it is a vital and ongoing service which Christian believers are called upon to contribute to society. In the area of economic life, such contributions will not necessarily prevent error or failure, make us rich, or solve the major and perennial issues besetting humanity. Yet the task is clearly expounded in Scripture: Give back to the Lord and to your neighbour the gifts the Lord has given you, in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 17-19). Christian (Reformational or other) reflection and action need not and will not bring on the new Jerusalem in our lifetime. We only need to be generous stewards of what we have inherited in order to edify the faithful and provide direction and support for our neighbour.

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