

From the Corpus Christianum to the Respublica Christiana: The Theologico-Historical Integration of Magisterial Office and the Biblical Covenant in the Political Thought of the Magisterial Reformers (1519 – 1555)

Prof. A.W.G. Raath

Samevatting

Die ontwikkeling van die reformatoriese politieke teologie vanaf Luther tot Bucer, het gepaard gegaan met die geleidelike integrasie van die konsepsie van die owerheidsamp met die Bybelse verbond. Die samevoeging het 'n aanvang met Luther se formulering van die geestelike band tussen kerklike en politieke ampte in die samelewing, op die basis van die sakrament van die doop, geneem. Vanaf die Lutherse Reformasie via Zwingli se konsolidering van die Christelike gemeenskap deur die integrerende effek van die doop tot by Bucer se Respublica Christiana het die reformatoriese teologiese federalisme die geleidelike opkoms van die konsep van die politieke verbond op die basis van die politieke legitimiteit van die Christelike politieke gemeenskap beleef. Indien Zwingli se idee van die Bybelse verbond die oorsaak was van wat Scott A. Gillis in 'n resente studie beskryf as: “(o)ne people and one church existing under one covenant”, was Bucer verantwoordelik vir die idee van 'n verenigde Christelike republiek gebaseer op die verbond.

1. Introduction

The first quarter of the sixteenth century saw the pioneering efforts of the first magisterial reformers in Germany and Switzerland to formulate the basis of magisterial authority and political power in opposition to medieval ecclesiocentrism in political affairs.¹ The main thrust of the

¹ For the role of ecclesiastical institutions in political affairs as the result of medieval conceptions of the relationship between the church and temporal rulers, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Vol. 1 The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1978] 2000), 14-15, 19-21; *Vol. 2: The Age of*

Reformational political theory was directed at the Pope's claims to "Over-Lordship", as the bearer of the sovereign *Sacerdotium*, which he urged against all other bearers of worldly authority, including the Emperor as bearer of *Imperium*; that the Emperor derives his office *mediately* from God, and *immediately* from the Head of the Church, and the doctrine of the Two Swords entailing that the sword delivered by the Pope to Peter did not confer free ownership, but the right of an ecclesiastical office-bearer, and the Pope retaining the *utrumque gladium*.¹

The efforts of the magisterial reformers to formulate a unifying principle of political and civil life in society, and to state the basis for the legitimate exercise of political authority², placed the focus on the role of the sacraments and the Biblical covenant in civil society.

The idea that civil society and law were the outcomes of a contract or pact was not new. Already Plato expressed the view, by mouth of Glaucon, in the second book of the *Republic*, that such a pact could serve as the basis of law, because men called what was in accordance with the compact just and lawful, and what was contrary to it, the reverse.³ When Martin Luther (1483-1546) initiated the Reformation, however, the ideas of pact or covenant were still submerged in the medieval concept of the *Corpus*

Reformation: 12-15, 27-9, 34-6, 50-3, 53-8, 58-64, 84-9, 91-3, 96-8, 99-100, 144-8, 179-80. The newly emerging Reformational views on political governance separated magistracy from the church and made the function of political government the service of the people (cf. Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, translation of "Die Kulturbedeutung der Reformation" in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1948) by Karl & Barbara Hertz & John L. Lichtblau (New York: Living Age Books, 1959), 45.

- 1 See Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, translation by F.W. Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1900] 1987), 13-4. Cf. T.S.R. Boase, *Boniface VIII* (London, 1933), 317, on the notorious Bull of 1302, *Unam Sanctam*, advancing the principle that both the temporal and the spiritual sword must be held by the vicar of Christ, since the spiritual power possesses the authority to institute earthly power and to stand in judgment over it."
- 2 This entails what J.N. Figgis, *Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414-1625* (New York, 1969), 84, calls Luther's destruction of "the metaphor of the two swords", meaning that "henceforth there should be one (sword), wielded by a rightly advised and godly prince."
- 3 At 359. Lindsay's translation reads: "Hence men began to establish laws and covenants with one another, and they called what the law prescribed lawful and just. This, then, is the origin and nature of justice" (*The Republic*, translation by A.D. Lindsay (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976), 37), while Jowett's translation is: "... hence there arise laws and mutual covenants; and that which is ordained by law is termed by them lawful and just. This they affirm to be the origin and nature of justice ..." (*The Republic of Plato*, translation by B. Jowett, third edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 38). Also see the commentaries of F.M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 40 and H.D.P. Lee, *Plato: The Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 90.

Christianum.¹ The pioneering efforts of Luther in the sphere of Reformational politics did, however, produce two important perspectives that provided valuable avenues for further development towards a Reformational view of political covenantalism by the reformers in Zurich (Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) and Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)), and in Strassburg (Martin Bucer (1491-1551)): firstly, stating and developing the concept of magisterial office and its limits, and secondly, finding the spiritual bond between ecclesiastical and political institutions in the testamentary nature of the sacraments.

By grafting the Reformational perspectives of magisterial office onto the Biblical covenant, Zwingli and Bullinger provided two primaries for establishing of what Bucer called the *Respublica Christiana*² and Calvin described as the *Christiana respublica*,³ the *communem Christianorum societatem*⁴ or the *Christiana politeia*.⁵

In this study it is submitted that the foundational work in the sphere of Reformational politics performed by both the German and Swiss Reformations is crucial to appreciate the federal nature of the Reformed politics visualized by Calvin and Bucer. Furthermore, it is stated that the *Respublica Christiana* was the Reformational model of covenantal politics advanced to fill the gap left by the collapse of the medieval order, and that the key elements of the *Respublica Christiana* were the definition of the powers of political authorities on the basis of the Biblical covenant, the future members of the Christian society uniting themselves through the sacrament of baptism and jointly accepting the conditions of the Biblical covenant, and the political rulers committing themselves to God and promoting the welfare of their subjects by establishing a political covenant.

The formulation of the theory of the *Respublica Christiana* in Bucer's theory can, therefore, be seen as the culminating point of the integration of

1 See Daniel J. Elazar, *Covenant & Commonwealth. From Christian separation through the Protestant Reformation: The Covenant Tradition in Politics Vol. II* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 158. The notion of the *Corpus Christianum*, to Elazar, 40-41, is fundamentally an organic model to serve the church in at least three respects: (1) by promoting the kind of familial unity sought by the church; (2) by merging comfortably with the symbols of body and blood in the Eucharist, and the consequent conception of the church as the body of Christ, or *Corpus Christianum*; and (3) by providing a recognizable language of political association for communication in a world dominated by the family, clan, and tribally based political entities.

2 Bucer's thought on the Christian republic came to maturity in his last great work, *De Regno Christi ... (The Kingdom of Christ)* (1557).

3 In the index of the 1536 edition of the *Institutes* (John Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, ed. by P. Bart and W. Niesel, 5 vols. (Monachii in Aedibus: Kaiser, 1926-1936).

4 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by J.T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, chapter xx, par. 17 [IV, xx, 17].

5 *Ibid.*, IV, xx, 3, 14.

magisterial office and sacramental unity in civil society, thereby forming the bridge between the Lutheran and Zwinglian Reformations.

2. The office of magistracy and the Corpus Christianum in the Lutheran Reformation

2.1 Luther and Melanchthon's conceptualization of magisterial office in the state

From 1520 to 1530 ecclesiastical opposition to Luther's Reformational work forced him to state the basic tenets of Protestant political theology.¹ The nature and role of political office enjoyed his primary attention. Although the Councils of Paris and Worms, as early as the year 829, accepted that kingly office is a *ministerium a Deo commissum*, that the *Rex* is called a *recte agendo*, and, that ceasing to rule well, he becomes a tyrant,² Luther in 1520 made the idea of magisterial office a foundational point of his political theology.³ In this year, in his political treatise *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, he dealt extensively with the idea of political office.⁴ In the tract *Whether Soldiers Too, Can Be Saved (Ob Kriegsleute Auch In Seligem Stande Sein Konnen)*⁵, of 1526, Luther went further by drawing a clear distinction between the office and the person occupying such office. In his pleas for the

1 Luther's most important early political writings were the following: *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* (1520); *A Treatise on Christian Liberty* (1520); *An Earnest Exhortation for all Christians, Warning Them Against Insurrection and Rebellion* (1522); *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* (1523), and *Whether Soldiers Too, Can be Saved* (1526). All references to the works of Luther, except where otherwise stated, are to the following source: Martin Luther, *Works*, (including his letters, sermons and tracts), Books for the Ages, translated with introduction and notes (Albany, USA: Ages Digital Library, 1997).

2 Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, translation by F.W. Maitland (Cambridge / New York / New Rochelle / Melbourne / Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 141-2.

3 See *Works* Vol. 2 (*An Open Letter To The Christian Nobility*, 43-116), at 51 [LW 2: 51].

4 In this treatise Luther investigates the nature and role of the relationship between spiritual office and worldly power in society. Frans Lau, *Der Glaube der Reformatoren Luther – Zwingli – Calvin* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1988), 94, traces in this work the remnants of the classical idea of the *corpus Christianum*, contra his work *On Secular Authority*, which reflects his idea of the separation of *sacerdotum*, and *imperium*. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms must be evaluated against the background of the medieval idea of the two estates: the temporal and the spiritual (cf. Alister Mcgrath, *Reformation Thought. An Introduction*. Third Edition (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 222. Charles M. Jacobs in the introduction to this work (at 46) sees its importance as being a connecting link between the thought of the Middle Ages and that of modern times, "prophetic of the new age but showing how closely the new is bound up with the old" [LW 5: 25].

5 *Works* Vol. 5, 20-56 [LW 5: 20-56].

restoration of magisterial office dating from this period, Luther maintained that an occupation or a work may be good and right in itself and yet be bad and wrong if the person in occupation or the doer of the work is not good and right, or does not do his duty rightly.¹ In his treatise *On Secular Government*,² of 1523, he had already stated his praise for temporal government, because the sword has been instituted of God to punish the evil, to protect the good and to preserve peace.³ The hand that wields the sword and slays with it is no longer man's hand, but God's and it is not man, but God, who “hangs, tortures, beheads, slays and fights.”⁴ Office, then, in itself, is godly, or as needful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work. The command to obedience to worldly ordinances is contained in both testaments.⁵ Even under the New Testament, the sword is established by God's “word and commandment”, and those who use it rightly and fight obediently, serve God thereby and are obedient to His Word.⁶ Although Christians do not fight and have no worldly rulers among them, because their government is a spiritual government, and they are subjects of Christ as far as body and property are concerned, they are subject to worldly rulers and owe them obedience.⁷ If, therefore, worldly rulers call on them to fight, they ought to, and be obedient, “not as Christians but as members of the state and obedient subjects, as regards the body and temporal possessions.”⁸

Luther's plea for the restoration of political office starts with a strong criticism of the medieval elevation of spiritual power above temporal power – remarks which would have a profound impact on Reformational politics in the following years. This criticism is Luther's “first wall of attack”.⁹ To him it is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be

1 *Ibid.*, 24 [LW 5: 24]: “An occupation or a work can be good and right in itself and yet be bad and wrong if the man in occupation or the doer of the work is not good and right or does not do his duty rightly.”

2 *Works* Vol. 3 (*Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*), 181-215 [LW 3: 181-215]. John R. Stephenson, “The Two Governments and the Two Kingdoms in Luther's Thought” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (No. 4 1981): 321-337, at 323, reduces the issues in Luther's *On Secular Authority*, to two fundamental questions: firstly, what is the purpose and task of secular authority and what – in view of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount – should be the attitude of a Christian called to exercise it?, and, secondly, what are the proper limits of secular authority and what is the fitting relationship between it and spiritual authority?

3 See *Whether Soldiers Too, Can Be Saved*, 25 [LW 5: 25].

4 *Ibid.*, 26 [LW 5: 26].

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, 26-27 [LW 5: 26-7].

7 *Ibid.*, 28 [LW 5: 28].

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Works* Vol. 2 (*An Open Letter To The Christian Nobility Of The German Nation*, 43-116, at 51 [LW 2: 43-116, 51].

called the “spiritual estate”, and princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the “temporal estate”.¹ To him this is “a fine bit of hypocrisy”, because all Christians are truly of the “spiritual estate”, and there is among them no difference at all but that of office – baptism, gospel and faith alone make man spiritual and a Christian people.² Through baptism all believers are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2: “Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom.”³ This “great grace and power” of baptism “and of the Christian Estate” was almost destroyed and caused the believers to forget through the canon law.⁴

Because temporal authorities are also baptized with the same baptism and have the same faith and Gospel as Christians, it must, to Luther, be granted that they are priests and bishops, and count their office one which has a proper and useful place in the Christian community: “For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, though it is not seemly that every one should exercise the office.”⁵ Luther’s point is clear: a priest in Christendom is nothing more or less than an office-holder; while he is in office he has precedence, when deposed, he is “a peasant or a townsman like the rest.”⁶

The implications of Luther’s arguments are threefold: firstly, there is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, “spirituals” and “temporals”, as they are called except that of office and work, but not of “estate”, for they are all the same estate⁷; secondly, just as those who are now called “spiritual” (priests, bishops or popes) are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities, – they bear the “sword and rod” with which to punish the evil and protect

1 *Ibid.*, 51 [LW 2: 51].

2 *Ibid.*, 51-52 [LW 2: 51-2].

3 *Ibid.*, 52 [LW 2: 52].

4 *Ibid.*, [LW 2: 52]. In the *Geneva Bible* [GB] Old Testament [OT] fol. 104(2)(a)-(b) verses 5 and 9 read: “Yee also as lively stones, be made a spiritual house, an holy Priesthood to offer up spirituall sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (verse 5) and: “But yee are a chosen generation, a royall Priesthood, an holy nation, a people set at libertie” (verse 9). All references are to the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible (Herbert 248 – the earliest of the 1599 editions he records).

5 *Ibid.*, 52-53 [LW 2: 52-3].

6 *Ibid.*, 53 [LW 2: 53]. Although Luther, therefore, maintained the concept of the two kingdoms, similar to the medieval idea of the “two estates”, he differed sharply from the Roman Catholic views on office. To Luther all Christians share the same priestly status (*Stand*) on account of their baptism, although they perform different functions. Cf. Mcgrath, 223.

7 *Works*, Vol. 2, 53 [LW 2: 53].

the good,"¹ and, thirdly, it means that each has his own work and office, yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his work or office must benefit and serve every other, in order to promote the “bodily and spiritual” welfare of the community.²

In his consideration of the issue whether “spiritual” estates may be punished by temporal powers, Luther advances that in the true Christian community, because temporal power is ordained of God to punish evil-doers and to protect them that do well, it should, therefore, be left free to perform its office without hindrance through the whole body of Christianity without respect of persons, “whether it affect pope, bishops, priests, monks, nuns or anybody else”³ – whoever is guilty must suffer, because every soul is subject to the higher powers because they do not bear the sword in vain, but are ministers of God for punishing evil-doers, and praising them that do well. From this follows important responsibilities – the office of political ruler demands that the prince must look to his subjects and see to it that he is rightly disposed towards them.⁴ That means that he must direct all his efforts towards being of use and service to them.⁵ He is not to see how he can lord it over them, but how they may be protected and defended, and enjoy the blessings of peace; princes should not seek their own advantage at their subject's hands, but theirs, by serving them in their office, protecting them, listening to them, and governing only for their benefit, not for his own. A prince should, therefore, dispense with his might and superiority, as far as his heart and mind are concerned, and attend to the needs of his subjects as if they were his own.⁶ This is what Christ has done for us, and these are the real works of Christian love.⁷

Luther's follower, Philip Melancthon's (1497-1521), mature views on magisterial office are contained in the later editions of his *Loci Communes*, first published in 1521, a year after Luther's treatise *To the Christian*

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 54 [LW 2: 54].

4 See *Works*, Vol. 3 (*Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*), 208 [LW 3: 208].

5 *Ibid.*, 208 [LW 3: 208]: “My concern must be, not how I may rule and be haughty, but how they may be protected and defended ...”

6 *Ibid.*, 208-9 [LW 3: 208-9]: “And he (the ruler) should picture Christ to himself, and say, “Behold, Christ the chief Ruler came and served me, sought not to have power, profit and honor from me, but only considered my need, and did all He could that I might have power, profit and honor from Him and through Him. I will do the same, not seek mine own advantage, and thus serve them by my office, protect them, give them audience and support, that they, and not I, may have the benefit and profit by it.”

7 *Ibid.*, 209 [LW 3: 209].

Nobility.¹ In the 1555 edition of this work² Melanchthon raises the issue of political office in the context of the formulation and application of human laws and his comments on magisterial office. To Melanchthon some human laws are civil, and others are pontifical.³ Civil laws are those which magistrates, princes, kings, and cities sanction in the political sphere. The authority of this type of laws which ought to be acknowledged is taught by St. Paul in Romans 13: 1-3.⁴

Melanchthon draws a distinction between what he calls “civil magistrates” on the one hand, and “ecclesiastical magistrates” on the other.⁵ The civil magistrate is he who bears the sword and watches over the civil peace. Matters belonging under the sword are civil rights, civil ordinances of public courts, and penalties for criminals. It is the obligation of the sword to enforce the law against murder, vengeance, etc. The fact that the magistrate wields authority to accomplish this, is pleasing to God.⁶

In typical Lutheran spirit, Melanchthon stresses that bishops are servants and neither powers nor magistrates, and secondly, that bishops have no right to establish laws, since they have been enjoined to preach only the Word of God, not that of men.⁷ Insofar as priests pass judgement in lawsuits and trials they obviously act as rulers of the world. As for the rest, in that which pertains to lawsuits and trials, the divine law subjects priests themselves to civil magistrates, kings and rulers: “But now with the connivings of the rulers, they have established laws for themselves, which are both godless and tyrannical to an outstanding degree, laws concerning immunities of churches, their own revenues, etc.”⁸

1 *Works*, Vol. 2 (*An Open Letter To The Christian Nobility Of The German Nation*), 43-116 [LW 2: 43-116].

2 Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* 1555, translation by Clyde L. Manschreck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1965).

3 *Ibid.*, 62. This is a manifestation of Luther's efforts to stress the equality of the ecclesiastical and political offices.

4 "Let every soule be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: and the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resisteth, shall receive to themselves condemnation. For magistrates are not to be feared for good workes but for evill. Wilt thou then be without fear of the power? Doe well: so shalt thou have praise of the same" [GB New Testament [NT] fol. 67(b)(2)].

5 *Ibid.*, 148.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 148-9.

8 *Ibid.*, 62.

2.2 *Covenant, testament and the spiritual nature of magisterial office in the Lutheran Reformation*

Luther's discourse on the Biblical covenant and testament reflects his commitment to the testamentary nature of the covenant and the covenantal nature of the gospel and the sacraments. To Luther a basic distinction should be drawn between law and testament, this being reflective of his distinction between law and gospel. A testament is not a law, but a donation or free gift, because heirs do not look for laws or burdens to be laid upon them by the testament, but they look for the inheritance confirmed thereby.¹ Drawing a sharp distinction between law and testament, Luther continues that no laws were given to Abraham, but a testament was made and delivered to him, meaning that the promises were pronounced to him as touching spiritual blessings.² If then the testament of men are kept, why should not rather the testament of God be kept, whereof the testament of man is but a sign, and the law cannot disannul the covenant that was confirmed before God in respect of Christ, for the promise is the testament of God, confirmed by God himself in respect of Christ many years before the law – that which God once has promised and confirmed, he does not call back again, but it remains ratified with him for ever.³

Referring to God's promises to Abraham, Luther states that he and every other patriarch recognized God's testament or covenant; it was delivered to them just as much as to us, although not at that time read and proclaimed to the world as after Christ's ascension.⁴ They also obtained the same as we and all God's children: the grace, the blessing, the testament, the faith.⁵ Referring to Paul's teaching of justification by faith, Luther states that the testament (of promise) includes in itself everything – justification, salvation, the inheritance and great blessing.⁶ Not through works but by faith the believers gain God's blessings: "We must approach him through the seed of Abraham, and be blessed through that seed, according to God's covenant."⁷ Commenting on the text from Isaiah 55: 3 ["I will give the holy and sure blessings of David"⁸ (reading in the Hebrew: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of Da-

1 *Works, Letter To The Galatians*, 311 [LW, *Galatians*, 311].

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 312 [LW, *Letter to the Galatians*, 312].

4 *Works, Sermons [LWS] Vol. 6 (Sermons on the Epistle Texts: Sunday After Christmas – Epistle Text Galatians 4: 1-7, 186-221, at 198 [LWS 6: 198].*

5 *Ibid.* [LWS 6: 198].

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 206 [LWS 6: 206].

8 *GB OT Part II [II] fol. 58(1)(a)*: "Encline your eares, and come unto mee: heare, and your soule shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David."

vid”)], Luther observes that Isaiah invites the whole world to receive the promises of salvation, for thereby shall the poor, the wretched and the afflicted obtain the great treasure of joy and salvation.¹ To Luther the thought is of a King and Ruler different from Moses and his priests and exponents of the Law.² This Leader shall not set up a new temporal government, but both Jews and gentiles should receive him and believe in him, obtaining the fulfilment of that promise termed a covenant of the sure mercies of David.³ This covenant, God says, he enters into and keeps, “a divine, sure covenant: through Christ shall be given whatever blessings God’s mercy shall bestow, with remission or blotting out of sins, redemption from death and life eternal.”⁴ The effects of Luther’s views on the nature of the Biblical covenant and the sacraments are most important for his political theology:

- (1) The power of the Gospel is elevated above that of all doctrine, even of the Law of God.⁵ This ministry is termed a “New Covenant”, more glorious than the ministry termed the “Old Covenant.”⁶ This “ministration of the New Covenant” and “of the Spirit” is a doctrine that does not teach what works are required of man, but it makes known to him what God would do for him.⁷ Christ is the mediator of this New Covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that we under the first covenant, they that have been called, may receive the promise of eternal inheritance.⁸ The Jews, wanting to have a Messiah according to the old covenant and paying no heed to this new covenant, miss both covenants “and hang between heaven and earth; the new covenant they will not, the old they cannot have; they are without any government, either physical or spiritual.”⁹ The physical, earthly government they do not have, for they have neither king nor lord, neither kingdom nor principedom. Also the spiritual they do not have, for

1 *Ibid.*, Sermons Vol. 6 (*Sermons on the Epistle Texts: St. John’s – Epistle Text (Sirach) Ecclesiasticus 15: 1-8*, 175-185, at 182-3 [*LWS* 6: 175-185, 182-3]).

2 *Ibid.*, 183: “... a ruler differing from every other lord, ruler and king, from David and all worldly rulers whatever, subjecting everything to himself” [*LWS* 6: 183].

3 *Ibid.* [*LWS* 6: 183].

4 *Ibid.* [*LWS* 6: 182-3]: “Now, if the Christ of this covenant is true man and, as the promise to David is, of David’s flesh and blood; and if he is to bring eternal mercy, he must likewise be God, such gift being in the province and power of God alone.”

5 *Works*, Sermons Vol. 8 (*12th Sunday After Trinity – Epistle Text: 2 Corinthians 3: 4-11*), 187-207, at 193 [*LWS* 8: 193].

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 195 [*LWS* 8: 195].

8 *Ibid.*, Sermons Vol. 7, 138 [*LWS* 7: 138].

9 *Ibid.*, Sermons Vol. 6, 308 [*LWS* 6: 308].

- they do not accept the new covenant.¹ On this point Luther describes the “old kingdom of Moses” as temporal government, remaining in the world and not preventing the establishment of the “new, spiritual, everlasting rule and kingdom of Christ under it and within it ...”.² Since God calls this a new kingdom, it must be far more glorious than the old kingdom was or is, and that it was God's will to make it far better than the old kingdom.³
- (2) God's promises to the believers find their focal point in the sacraments. To Nicolas Hausmann, Luther wrote that the sacred water of baptism represents a fresh covenant between God and the nations, to their everlasting salvation.⁴ The promises of the Lord are loving kindness and truth “unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies: Loving kindness or mercy in the promise; faithfulness and truth in the fulfilling or hearing of the promises.”⁵ Baptism is the culminating point of God's testament with man: “No forgiveness is to be found except upon the terms of our baptism.⁶ Never allaying is God's covenant – if broken, no new covenant is to be sought.⁷ The holy sacrament of baptism helps you, because in it God allies Himself with you, and becomes one with you ”in a gracious covenant of comfort”.⁸ Even the believer may sin and fall at times, these sins are already done away by the power of the sacrament and covenant “if only you rise again and enter into the covenant” as St. Paul says in Romans 8:1: Baptism is indeed, so great thing that if the believer turns again from his sins and appeals to the covenant of baptism, his sins are forgiven.⁹ If this covenant did not exist, and God were so merciful as to wink at our sins, there could be no sin

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*, 307 [*LWS* 6: 307].

3 *Ibid.*, 309 [*LWS* 6: 309].

4 *Works*, Letters [*LWL*], No. 306, 330-331 (Luther to Nicolas Hausmann, January 3, 1534), at 331 [*LWL* 309: 330-1, 331]. Different to the Catholic idea of the efficacy of baptism, Luther saw baptism as a sign of God's promise. Baptism, like the Word, to Luther, conveyed the promise of salvation through the grace of God – the promise being valid for a lifetime (see C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and rural society. The parish of Brandenburg – Ansbach – Kulmbach 1528-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167.

5 *Ibid.*, Sermons Vol. 3, (*Sermons on Gospel Texts for Pentacost – Fifth Sunday After Easter (Rogate): Second Sermon on John 6: 23-30*), 152-155, at 154 [*LWS* 3: 152-5, 154].

6 *Works*, Vol. 1 (*A Treatise On The Holy Sacrament Of Baptism* (1519), 43-60, 45 [*LW* 1: 45].

7 *Ibid.* [*LW* 1: 45].

8 *Ibid.*, 52 [*LW* 1: 52].

9 *Ibid.*, 53 [*LW* 1: 53]. *GB NT* fol. 64(2)(b): “Now then there *is* no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, which walke not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”.

so small but it would condemn us.¹ In baptism forgiveness takes place through God's covenant with the believers; therefore we must not doubt this forgiveness.²

- (3) The sacramental nature of God's covenant or testament also comes to expression in the mass – in the New Testament Christ made a promise or solemn vow, which we are to believe and thereby come to godliness and salvation.³ This promise is the word in which Christ says: “This is the cup of the New Testament.”⁴ In every covenant there are two things which one must consider, namely Word and Sign.⁵ In baptism these are the words of the baptizer and the dipping in water. In the mass they are the words and the bread and the wine.⁶ The words are the divine covenant, promise and testament.⁷ The signs are the sacraments, that is sacred signs.⁸ Since the testament is more important than the sacraments, so the words are much more important than the signs.⁹ For the sign might be lacking, if only one has the words, and thus one might be saved without the sacrament, yet not without the testament: “For I can daily enjoy the sacrament of the mass, if I only keep before my eyes the testament, that is, the words and covenant of Christ, and feed and strengthen my faith thereby.”¹⁰ To Luther, then, the best and greatest part of all sacraments and of the mass is the words and covenant of God, without which the sacraments are dead; “like a body without a soul, a cask without wine, a purse without gold, a type without fulfilment, a letter without spirit, a sheath without a knife.”¹¹ When, therefore, we look only to the sacrament and sign, we do not even half keep the mass: “For sacrament without testament is keeping the case without the jewel, quite an unequal separation and division.”¹² To Luther it is essential to first know what a testament is, in order to understand the mass.¹³ A testament is a promise made by one about to die, in which he designates his bequest and

1 *Ibid.*, 53 [LW 1: 53].

2 *Ibid.*, 56 [LW 1: 56].

3 *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 (*A Treatise On The New Testament That Is The Holy Mass* (1519)), 230-254, at 233 [LW 1: 230-254, 233].

4 *Ibid.* [LW 1: 233].

5 *Ibid.*, 233 [LW 1: 233].

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 239 [LW 1: 239].

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Works*, Vol. 2 (*A Prelude On The Babylonian Captivity Of The Church* (1520)), 117-211, at 140 [LW 2: 140].

appoints his heirs. A testament, therefore, involves first the death of the testator, and secondly, the promise of the bequest and the naming of the heir.¹ The words “covenant” and “testament of the Lord” signify that God would one day die; but God could not die unless He became man.² Thus both the incarnation and death of Christ are briefly comprehended in this one word: “testament”.³ The promissory character of God's testament and covenant is expressed in the mass, “that crown of all His promises”, where God adds His body and blood in the bread and wine as a memorial sign of his great promise, and in baptism God adds the words of promise, the sign of immersion in water.⁴ From this we learn that in every promise of God two things are presented to us – the Word and the Sign – so that we can understand the word to be the testament, but the sign to be the sacrament.⁵

- (4) In his interpretation of Biblical texts such as those of Romans 12:19⁶, Matthew 5:44⁷ and 1 Peter 3:9⁸ sounding as if Christians in the New Covenant were to have no secular sword, Luther distinguishes between those who belong to the kingdom of God and those who belong to the kingdom of the world.⁹ All those who truly believe in Christ belong to God's kingdom and need neither secular (*weltliche*) Sword nor law, and if all the world (*Welt*) were true Christians, that is, if everyone truly believed, there would be neither need nor use for princes, kings, lords, the sword or law.¹⁰ The just man (*der Gerechte*) of his own accord does all and more than the law demands, but the unjust do nothing that is right, and there-

1 *Ibid.* [LW 2: 140].

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 145 [LW 2: 145].

5 *Ibid.* On occasion Luther equates testament and covenant with the Word of God: The Word of God is called in Scripture testament, *testimonia, pacta, foedera*, testimonies, agreements, covenants, “as these postulate faith; nor did God ever command us to believe any of his works without the Word” (*Works*, Sermons, Vol. 1 (*Epiphany – Text Matthew 2: 1-12*), 303-428, at 351 [LWS 1: 351].

6 *GB NT* fol. 67(2)(a): “Dearely beloved, avenge not your selves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord.”

7 *GB NT* fol. 4(2)(b): “But I say unto you, Love your enemies: blesse them that curse you: doe good to them that hate you, and pray for them which hurt you, and persecute you.”

8 *GB NT* fol. 105(1)(b): “Not rendring evill for evill, neither rebuke for rebuke: but contrariwise blesse, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should be heires of blessing.”

9 *Works*, Vol. 3 (*Secular Authority. To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*), 179-215, 185 [LW 3: 185].

10 *Ibid.*

fore, they need the law to teach, compel and urge them to do rightly.¹ All those who are not Christians belong to the kingdom of the world or are under the law. There are few who believe, and even fewer who behave like Christians and refrain from doing evil. For the rest God has established another government outside the Christian estate and the kingdom of God, and has cast them into subjection to the sword.² Luther, therefore, draws a distinction between “kingdom” (*Reich*) and “government” (*Regiment*), being the result of God's having ordained two governments, the spiritual government which fashions true Christians and just persons through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the secular (*weltliche*) government which holds the unchristian and wicked in check and forces him to keep the peace outwardly.³

- (5) To the question whether Christians can wield the secular sword and punish the wicked, Luther answers that although there is no need to bear the sword over or among Christians, and the question is therefore irrelevant in that context, the answer is positive in connection with the unchristian.⁴ To this group you owe the sword your service and support, by whatever means are available to you, for this is a work of which you yourself have no need, but your neighbour and the whole world.⁵ Because all actions must be devoted wholly to the service of others, your actions of governing by the sword would benefit only your neighbour and not yourself.⁶ As far as the possessions of the believer are concerned, he keeps to the Gospel and acts according to Christ's word; he would gladly turn the other cheek and give up his cloak when his possessions are involved: “And so the two are nicely reconciled: you satisfy the demands of God's kingdom and the world's at one and the same time, outwardly and inwardly; you both suffer evil and injustice and yet punish them; you do not resist evil and yet you do resist it. For you attend to yourself and what is yours in one way, and to your neighbour and what is his in another.”⁷ While believers suffer injustice as true

1 *Ibid.*, 186 [LW 3: 186]: “Therefore, it is not possible for the secular sword and law to find any work to do among Christians, since of themselves they do much more than its laws and doctrines can demand. Just as Paul says in 1 Timothy 1: 19, ‘The law is not given for the righteous, but for the unrighteous.’”

2 *Ibid.*[LW 3: 186] : “To put it as briefly as possible here, Paul says that the law is given for the sake of the unrighteous, that is, that those who are not Christians may through the law be externally restrained from evil deeds”

3 *Ibid.*

4 See *Ibid.*, 187 [LW 3: 187].

5 *Ibid.*, 190 [LW 3: 190].

6 See *Ibid.*, 189 [LW 3: 189].

7 The translation in Luther's *Works, Ibid.*, 191 [LW 3: 191] reads: “In this way, then, things are well balanced, and you satisfy at the same time God's kingdom inwardly and

Christians, they act in accordance with the command of love by tolerating no injustice against him. Luther refutes the view that the Old Covenant is abolished and no longer valid and that there is no point in rehearsing the examples from the Old Testament, by maintaining that the Old Covenant is no longer valid in the sense that “doing or omitting are left free, and no longer bind on pain of losing our souls, as they did formerly.”¹ The same is true of all other parts of the Old Covenant: it is neither wrong to omit, nor wrong to do, but everything is left free and good, to be done or omitted because everyone has a duty to do what is necessary for his neighbour, irrespective of whether it is under the Old or New Covenant – love penetrates everything and transcends everything, and looks only to the need and advantage of others, but does not ask whether it is old or new.² The same applies to the use of the sword – you are free to follow them or not. But when you see your neighbour in need, then love obliges you to do what would otherwise be left free to do or omit.³

In the 1555 edition of his *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon follows Luther's approach to the covenant, the testament and the gospel.⁴ In the line of Luther, he does not draw a material distinction between “testament” and “covenant”, for the word “testament”, to Melanchthon, the Hebrew language uses the word “covenant”, or “promise”, or “obligation”; and the Old Testament, or the Old Covenant, properly speaking, is the promise in accordance with which God gave a certain country to the stem of Israel.⁵ God also established a worldly government, bound it with his own laws and ceremonies, and promised the people help and protection, “all so that this country and government might be a lodging place for the divine promises of the saviour Christ, of the true church of God, and of the Lord Christ himself.”⁶ The establishment and maintenance of this land and government was a special gift of God and witness that God himself is gathering a church among mankind, and he himself protects and preserves it.⁷ After the flood, God led Abraham out of Chaldea and promised a Messiah to his children. God promised them land and a government that

the kingdom of the world outwardly, at the same time suffer evil and injustice and yet punish evil and injustice, at the same time do not resist evil and yet resist it. For in the one case you consider yourself and what is yours, in the other you consider your neighbor and what is his.”

1 *Ibid.*, 192 [LW 3: 192].

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 See *Loci Communes*, 192.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

should last for two thousand years, until the Messiah appeared. With this government was a special gift of the law, the Ten Commandments, or *legem moralem*, which God renewed with testimonies because the blindness of the world was so great that the doctrine of the law had become extinct.¹ God in his special counsel set before the entire world his law, that we might know it, and know that it is God's eternal unchangeable wisdom.²

The New Testament is the promise in which God said that he would send his only begotten Son, and through Christ, on account of his obedience, without any merit on our part, would give to believers forgiveness of sins, grace, the Holy Spirit, eternal righteousness, and blessedness.³ The word “testament” implies a promise concerned with death, and this promise of grace is just such a testament, for Christ, the Saviour, has confirmed it with his death, as stated at length in Scripture.⁴

The implications of Melancthon's views on covenant, testament and gospel generally follow Luther's line of thought: (1) The promise of grace was revealed soon after the fall of Adam, it is nevertheless called *new*: “We should retain old and new in accordance with the times of both kingdoms, the temporal and the eternal. The worldly was ordained for this temporal life at the end of which the saviour was visibly to appear.⁵ The eternal kingdom began through the Resurrection, and the new kingdom is to be full of splendour, for this temporal life will entirely cease, and after the resurrection of the dead, the entire church will live in eternal wisdom, righteousness, and joy with God.”⁶

(2) The worldly kingdom is called the *old* promise because it grows old and ceases, but the promise of grace is eternal (*the eternal testament*) because it remains with the believers even though they lose all their physical goods.⁷ This distinction between the *old promise* and the *promise of grace*, is closely aligned to the distinction between law and gospel. The word “gospel” in the old Greek language means “joyful tidings”, and God chose to make common this word about the preaching of grace in order to remind us that this preaching about Christ is far different from law.⁸ The law proclaims to us the great wrath of God against our sin, and says noth-

1 *Ibid.*, 192-193.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 193.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, 141.

ing about the forgiveness of sin, without merit.¹ The gospel is the divine proclamation in which men, once they have heard of God's anger against sin and truly tremble before God's wrath, are presented with the most gracious promise that God, *for the sake of Christ*, graciously, *without merit on man's part*, want to forgive them their sins and to justify them, and that the Son of God will bring comfort to those who believe and bestow on them the Holy Spirit and an inheritance of eternal life – all of which is to be received through faith.²

(3) The promissory nature of the gospel is twofold. The first, the highest and most necessary, is the promise of the Son of God and of grace, and differs vastly from law: basically the law “is a teaching which commands perfect obedience and does not freely impart forgiveness of sins without merit on our part. The law says no one is justified who is not as the divine law indicates one should be”.³ The gospel, however, has the Reconciler Christ and the difference is: freely, without merit.⁴ This is very important, “for in true anguish the heart struggles not particularly with whether God will be gracious to anyone who has sinned, whether he will be gracious to one who has no merits, whether he will receive us, even though he has received others.”⁵

(4) The promise of the Son of God and forgiveness of sins, grace, and eternal salvation is often confirmed with a divine oath, so that we may not remain mired in doubt and despair in it. The promise of grace is the eternal covenant, the eternal testament, for through it eternal salvation is given, for the promise is sure and firm for all times and for all men who accept it with faith.⁶ The divine oath is immutable, “*As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*”⁷

(5) The word “sacrament” commonly refers to the eternal words and forms (*Geberden*) which Christ instituted as signs to signify his promise and grace. For the two sacraments, baptism and participation in the body and blood of Christ, have words and signs, which Christ himself commanded and appended to the promise of grace to remind us and to attest

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*, 142.

3 *Ibid.*, 143-144.

4 *Ibid.*, 144.

5 *Ibid.*, 145.

6 *Ibid.*, 148.

7 *Ibid.*, 206.

that the promise of grace is given and applied to those men who use these external signs, as divine doctrine instructs us.¹

3. The Zurich Reformation and the integration of magisterial office and the Biblical covenant

3.1 Huldrych Zwingli and the consolidation of the Christian community

The integration of the Biblical covenant, the sacraments and magisterial office stands to the credit of the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli. Traces of the political use of the Biblical covenant in the development of Zwingli's political federalism, according to Robert C. Walton, can already be detected as early as the spring and summer of 1522.² Touching on the covenant in his *Supplicatio ad Hugonem episcopum Constantiensem*, dated July 1522, Zwingli focussed on the preaching of the gospel in furthering Christian unity in the commonwealth.³ To Zwingli the Bishops' duty was to preach God's Word, similar to the task and functions of the prophets. The prophets reminded the Israelites of God's covenant with them and the Bishops should do the same for the Swiss.⁴ Already in his *Admonition*, dated the 16th May 1522, Zwingli expressed himself strongly on the unity of the Christian community.⁵ To Zwingli the covenant entails that God is our God and we his people – the covenant made with the people of Israel was made with all the people, including the children, and through this people the covenant will extend to all peoples.⁶ God is fundamentally concerned with unity – God willed that all men be descended from one father, for the sake of unity; God created man in his own image, so that just as the three persons are one God, who cannot be in disharmony with himself, so also the life of men might be peaceful and united. God's purpose in creation and regeneration is unity – we are to be one body, whose head is Christ.⁷

The unity of the Christian community, to Zwingli, is also expressed in the close relationship between ecclesiastical and political institutions in the functioning of the Christian commonwealth. The fundamental difference between Zwingli's and Luther's views on society entails that “Zwingli ...

1 *Ibid.*, 206.

2 *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 104.

3 Emil Egli & Georg Finsler, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke* (hereafter cited as *Z*), Band I (München: Kraus Reprint, 1981), 189.

4 *Ibid.*, 109.

5 See A.W.G. Raath & S.A. de Freitas, “Calling and Resistance: Huldrych Zwingli's (1484-1531) Political Theology and his Legacy of Resistance to Tyranny,” *Koers* 67(1) (April 2002), 45-76, 49.

6 See *Z*: I 167.14-169.4.

7 *Ibid.*

held to a single sphere rather than to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms. Zwingli argued that the elders of the New Testament were the equivalent of the magistrate of his day. The council of the Christian city ... rightfully ruled both the civil community and the church, which were virtually identical.”¹

Within the consolidated Christian community, magisterial office has a most important role. Magisterial government is committed to human righteousness in outward things. To Zwingli there would be no need of government, if all were Christians. Because all men are not Christians, the church also has a need of government, “for wherever the members of Christ do not arrive at the measure of the perfection of the head there is no need for the sword.”²

In his treatise *On True and False Religion*, from the year 1525, Zwingli had already extensively integrated the office of magistracy with the idea of the Biblical covenant. In this work Zwingli devoted a whole section to the office of magistracy in the Christian commonwealth, his primary aim being to show, contrary to the views of the Anabaptists, that no man is capable of magistracy unless he is a Christian.³ The spirit of Christ demands that love prevails in the Christian commonwealth; and since the gospel brings this with it, it is evident that the Christian community becomes strong and holy only if “good hearts are united with good laws.”⁴ No community, therefore, is happier than that in which true religion dwells.⁵ Tyranny, to Zwingli, is to assume authority on one's own, but although tyranny is forbidden by Christ, there must be some headship in every state, “as even in a flock of sheep there must be some ram that leads the rest.”⁶ Because there have always been those who under the guise of piety indulge in the same reckless course as the impious, we must also always have magistrates, “and above all Christian magistrates is a Christian peo-

1 J.W. Baker, “Zwinglianism,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Part IV (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 323-327, 324.

2 Z VI i 131.15-16.

3 S.M. Jackson, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1912), 239-319, at 293-294.

4 *Ibid.*, 295.

5 *Ibid.* This brings the preaching of God's Word into focus – true reformation in the ecclesiastical and political spheres starts with the preaching of the gospel (see Fritz Büsser, *Wurzeln der Reformation in Zürich* (Roots of the Reformation in Zurich) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 200: “Hier (in der Veründigen von Gottes Wort) begann die Erneuerung des Glaubens, der Kirche, hier begann aber auch die politische und soziale Wandlung.”

6 Jackson, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, 298.

ple.”¹ Magistracy can only be abolished when wrong-doing has been so thoroughly abolished “that no man sins either with tongue or in deed.”²

In contrast to Melanchthon, Zwingli maintains that there are no sacerdotal and lay magistrates, but only one, for the power of the church by which the shameless sinner is shut out from communion is not that of the magistrate, as the bishops have thus far exercised it; it belongs to the whole church, not to certain persons who have despotically arrogated supreme authority to themselves.³

The implications of magisterial office in the Christian community are that church and society are not separate entities, but the community under the rule of God.⁴ Although the minister and the magistrate have different functions, the one responsible for preaching and the other for ruling, both tasks are related and are subjected to the kingship of Christ.⁵ The function of magistracy is not only to stop unrest and disunity but temporal rulers should also act in removing members of the church for the good of the church.⁶ This unity between the offices of magistracy and preacher is the result of Zwingli's views on the “wholeness of the community” so that government may remove members from the church for the sake of the body.⁷ Magistracy is not simply ordained of God, it also denotes the magistrate being the subject of God – in the Old Testament they are even called gods.⁸ The magistrate bears the sword in the name of God; he is accountable to God, without magisterial government human society would be impossible.⁹ There is a distinction between the ruler as private person and as a person holding office. The magistrate has a close relationship with God's people and those who are not believers should not rule over God's people, because magistrates are among the shepherds of the church.¹⁰

Zwingli's most important contributions to the development of Reformed politics were his views on the relationship between magistracy and ecclesiastical institutions, spanning the whole of the Christian community. The

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 308.

4 See W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 282.

5 Z I 463.10-11.

6 Z II 324.11-18.

7 Z II 324.9-13.

8 Z II 324.1-4.

9 Z II 487.27-488.8.

10 Z IV 58.46-59.2.

whole of Christian society is under the rule of God and ministers and magistrates are called upon to establish that rule, and not that political government or magistracy be subservient to the church or the pastors.¹

Although Luther, as early as 1522, referred to the covenant in his treatise *On Secular Power*, it was Zwingli who was the father of the Reformational principle of the covenant as the integrating principle for political life in the Christian community. Zwingli attached the sacrament of baptism, as the sign of God's covenant with man, to man's political life in the Christian community – baptism actually serves as the instrument for enrolling Christian believers into the people of God; it is the outward sign that all should receive who are included in the covenant. Also the Eucharist has political implications to Zwingli in so far as it is seen as the inward union of believers in the Christian community

3.2 Heinrich Bullinger's views on magisterial office in the covenanted community

The main components of Zwingli's contribution in the development of a Reformed theory of magisterial office in the Christian community were accommodated in Bullinger's political theology. Firstly, he subscribed to both Zwingli's and Luther's distinction between ecclesiastical and political government – the king is not called upon to preach, to baptize, and to minister the sacraments, to give judgement against a murderer, “or by pronouncing sentence to take up matters in strife.”² Secondly, magistracy, to Bullinger, is ordained of God – similar to Zwingli's distinction between the office of magistracy and the person appointed to such office. Bullinger maintains the distinction between the office that is the good ordinance of God, and the evil person who executes that office.³ Thirdly, Zwingli's concern for the magistrate being subject to both tables of the law, also finds parallels in Bullinger's approach to the enforcement of God's law by magistrates in the Christian community⁴, in the performance of their duties to order, to judge and to punish; because magistracy involves the duty to order rightly matters of religion, and making good laws for the preservation of honesty, justice, and common peace.⁵ Fourthly, subjects have to obey the office of magistracy, because the magistrate's

1 See Stephens, 286.

2 See Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger* (4 vols.; ed. for the Parker Society; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849-1852), 2:329 (decade 2, sermon 7 [II:7]).

3 See *Ibid.*, 2:314 [II:6].

4 *Ibid.*, 2: 323 [II:7].

5 *Ibid.*

office is ordained of God “for men's commodity, and that God by the magistrate doth frankly bestow on us very many and great commodities.”¹

Through the efforts of Zwingli and Bullinger, Luther's work on the nature and function of magisterial office in society were integrated with Zwingli's paradigm of the Biblical covenant. From the Zurich Reformation there evolved the first theoretical explanation of the theocratic ideal in Reformational theology. The idea of the Christian theocracy functioning through the offices of pastors and magistrates was accepted as the basis for the views of Martin Bucer in Strasburg in the formulation of his perspectives on the *Respublica Christiana*.²

4. Martin Bucer on the office of magistracy and the Biblical covenant in the Christian commonwealth

4.1 The office of magistracy in the commonwealth

The Reformation in Strasburg was led by Martin Bucer, next to Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli and Calvin, the most influential of the Protestant reformers.³ Bucer's political theology is reflective of his efforts to unite the German and Swiss Reformations.⁴ He fruitfully utilized both Luther's perspectives on magisterial office and Zwingli's theology of the Biblical covenant in his conception of the Christian republic.⁵

- 1 *Ibid.*, 2: 279 [II:5]. For Bullinger's legacy of the covenant and his views on the office of magistracy, cf. A.W.G. Raath & S.A. de Freitas, “Theologico-Political Federalism: The Office of Magistracy and the Legacy of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575),” *WTJ* 63 (2001), 285-304.
- 2 It would probably be more correct to describe Bucer's theocratic ideal as a “Christocracy”, being a social order that depends on a church formed and organized according to the authority of the Bible. See Wendel, ed., *De Regno Christi*, 16, n.12.
- 3 Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi in The Library of Christian Classics* vol. XIX, ed. by Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 155-394, in the editor's introduction, at 155.
- 4 *Ibid.* : “He spent much time and energy in order to obtain unity in the ranks of the Reformers through the reconciliation of Luther and Zwingli.”
- 5 It is also noteworthy that he was strongly influenced by the political organization of the Old Testament Hebrew polity (see his *Epistola D. Pauli ad Ephesios ... In eandem Commentarius (Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians)* (Straatsburg: 1527), 57b, in *Bibliographia Bucerana* [Bibl.], Bearb. Von R. Stupperich in *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* [SVGR] No. 17. For his general views on magisterial office and its role in the Christian polity, see his *Dialogi* (1535) in *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, hrg. v. R. Stupperich, [BDS] 6, 2, 38-188 and his *Metaphrasen et enarrationes ... Tomus primus. Continens metaphrasin et enarrationem in Epistolam ad Romanos* (Argentorari[Straatsburg]: 1536 (Bibl. No. 55). The commentaries by Marijn de Kroon, *Martin Bucer en Johannes Calvijn. Reformatorische perspectieven. Teksten en inleiding* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1991), at 131-136, and “De christelijke overheid in de schriftuitleg van Martin Bucer en Johannes Calvijn” in W. Balke, C. Graafland & H. Harkema (eds.), *Wegen en gestalten in het Gereformeerd Protestantisme*,

In his *De Regno Christi* (1550) he directly related both church and magistracy to the kingdom of Christ.¹ To Bucer both the church and political government are divine and necessary institutions in the Christian commonwealth. Both church and political government are furthermore directly related to the Kingdom of Christ.² To Bucer the Kingship of Christ (*Regnum Christi*) means the rule of Christ as manifested in the life of mankind, ordered according to Christ's will as revealed in the Bible.³ Man's "well and happy" living in the community is only attainable in the Christian commonwealth (*respublica Christiana*) which is shaped and ruled by the Christian Church and a Christian government. Both church and magistracy are needed to cultivate religion.⁴

Political government also has the responsibility to ensure that the Church functions according to the law of Christ and if necessary, carry out the necessary reformation. Political rulers are entitled to use coercion to bring about conformity with certain requirements of church discipline, mainly pertaining to church attendance and the sanctification of Sundays and holidays.⁵

The first principle of the *respublica Christiana*, according to Bucer, demands of political government that by "education and proper training" the gifts of the citizens are developed: "to search for and explore what function of life has been designated by God for each citizen, and to take care that each citizen is initiated, prepared, and helped toward this end from

(Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976), 61-74 (mainly on the relationship between church and state), are particularly useful introductions to Bucer's views on magisterial office and the reformational role of political office.

1 *De Regno Christi*, 166.

2 *Ibid.*, 167.

3 *Ibid.*, 157. He adds: "The true life is realizable only in a Christocracy, i.e., no man can live 'well and happily,' except in a Christocratic society, i.e., a Christian commonwealth (*respublica Christiana*) which is shaped and dominated by the Christian Church and a Christian government" (157). For the responsibility of political rulers to establish and maintain true religion according to Bucer's theocratic ideals, cf. Wilhelm Pauck, *Das Reich Gottes auf Erden. Utopie und Wirklichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Butzers De Regno Christi ...* (Berlin, 1928), 53-63 and, Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi* (Vol. XV of *Martini Buceri Opera Latina*), ed. by Francois Wendel (Paris, 1955), 16.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, 163. Bucer expresses himself very strongly on the duties of political rulers to cultivate religion. Pauck describes this principle in Bucer's theology as follows: "The political rulers, therefore, must make sure that the Church is ordered according to the law of Christ. If necessary, they must carry out a reformation" (at 167). The political power does not replace the spiritual, but assumes it (see Martin Greschat, "The relation between church and civil community in Bucer's reforming work" in D.F. Wright (ed.), *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17. Greschat also points out that Bucer's theology was in no way bound to one fixed constitutional or legal form of political power (23).

childhood.”¹ This entails that God “attends to the details of providing and making abundantly available the necessities of life” to his subjects so that not a single one among his people shall be in need of these things, for he knows what they need.² Secondly, to Bucer, a close relationship between political government and the church has to be maintained – they both have responsibilities for maintaining order in the Christian commonwealth with regard to family life and the poor, and both are instruments by which, under God, Christ exercises his rule and they cooperate towards attaining the same ultimate end.³ Thirdly, the commonwealth is in need of laws wisely enacted, strenuously defended by ordinary magistrates and the obedience of all strictly exacted so that good magistrates are called “living laws”.⁴

The need for the office of magistracy in the Christian commonwealth entails that care will be taken that “there will never be lacking to his subjects pious, holy, and prudent magistrates who love the commonwealth.”⁵ The propensity of human weakness for all vices is that there is no one who does not need a watchman, monitor, and overseer of piety and virtue. Closely attached to the foregoing is Bucer's views of an established order of magistrates for the citizens in Christ's commonwealth: “From this division of the magistrates the commonwealth will obtain this advantage, that more exact accounts of the lives of the individual citizens could be had, that the vices of all could be observed and corrected in time, and that virtues could be aroused, defended and promoted; if the lower magistrates were deficient the higher ones could readily amend and repair their negligence rather than quickly and salutary.”⁶ In order to accomplish this conscientiously and consistently, God willed these magistrates in the Christian commonwealth to be selected with utmost care, by an accurate investigation of his gifts to individuals, so that they may be “men endowed with heroic virtue, fearing God, loving virtue and hating lucre and gain.”⁷

In order to faithfully teach the citizens pure religion, it is necessary for the magistrates themselves to excel others in both knowledge of and zeal for the Christian religion. This is why God has commanded that magistrates of the law should be approved and “praiseworthy in the fear and true wor-

1 *Ibid.*, 227.

2 *Ibid.*, 168.

3 *Ibid.*, 168-9. This also includes the reciprocal subjection of the Church and political government to one another.

4 *Ibid.*, 361.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, 362.

7 *Ibid.* The reference here is to Ex. 18: 21.

ship of his name.”¹ On this account, God specifically requires of the magistrates of his people that they be men of truth – singular lovers and supporters of and campaigners for truth and sincerity.² To Bucer God demands of magistrates that “they hate all base gain and wicked lucre, so that they will abstain from all unrighteous greed for possessions and be able to see more clearly and safeguard more constantly what is just and fair. Then they will protect the commonwealth from this plague of human society, the desire for having more than is fair ... and they will arouse, foster, and champion humaneness, kindness, and generosity.”³

4.2 *The integration of magistracy, the sacraments and the respublica Christiana*

By the time of the publication of his *De Regno Christi* in 1550, Martin Bucer had already subscribed to the idea of the Biblical covenant and had integrated it with his views on the sacraments and the Christian commonwealth.⁴ Analyzing the similarities between the kingdoms of the world and of Christ, Bucer states that similar to the kings of the world, “so also Christ our heavenly King wants his subjects to be received into and sealed for his Kingdom, to be gathered into his congregations, to come together in his name, and to be ruled by his ministries by means of certain covenants and sacraments of an external nature.”⁵ Leaning towards Luther’s application of the principle of love in political affairs, Bucer advances that for those over whom Christ, our heavenly King, truly reigns, seek nothing for themselves, but only what is useful for others.⁶ The kings of the world also have the duty to obtain all these things in the commonwealth. They use external power and domain toward these goals in such a way that not a single one of their subjects is in need, but rather that enough will be available to each in order to live well and happily.⁷ There is also this similarity between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of Christ, that just as the kingdoms of the world are subordinated to the Kingdom of Christ, so also is the Kingdom of Christ in its own way subordinated to the kingdoms of the world.⁸ This means that Christ wills that his own should obey from the heart not only the true kings and just

1 *Ibid.*, 362.

1 *Ibid.*, 363.

2 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 182.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, 183: “Accordingly, because brotherly love really flourishes among them, those who are endowed with an abundance of temporal goods share liberally with those who suffer from a need of these things.”

7 *Ibid.* : Acts 2: 44 and 4: 35.

8 *Ibid.*, 186.

princes of the world, but also very iniquitous lords and terrible tyrants to whom public power has been given.¹

Following the Zurich line on baptism as a uniting principle in the Christian commonwealth, Bucer states that in holy baptism, all are incorporated into the kingdom of Christ and pledge themselves to its obedience; they come together frequently in sacred assemblies in order there to hear more fully the doctrine of Christ and adopt themselves more surely to his discipline. When the ministers of the churches have been legitimately established and they rightfully fulfil their office, all true kings and princes humbly hear the voice of Christ from the ministers and respect in them the majesty of the Son of God, as they administer not their own, but only the words and mysteries of eternal life.²

The implications of Bucer's views on the covenant are that political rulers have the covenantal duty to take every precaution to prevent any one of their subjects from doing injury to another, to prevent children from repudiating the guidance of their parents, slaves from escaping their masters, etc.³ This covenantal perspective on the Christian commonwealth is also related to Bucer's description of Christ's Kingdom: it is the administration and care of eternal life of the elect of God in this world, by which the only begotten-Son of God gathers to himself from the world (although he wishes them to be subjects for good to the powers of the world), indeed, to all men in the world, to whom he himself has made them neighbours; those so gathered he incorporates into himself and his holy church "which is his body by most holy Baptism and the compact and sanction of the solemn divine covenant, that is, adopted into sonship."⁴ The sacrament of baptism, therefore, plays a key function in admitting the believers into the Kingdom of Christ; through baptism sins are forgiven and washed away and "their adoption as sons of God confirmed and sealed" by this "covenant of salvation".⁵

The covenant of salvation was also confirmed in the Old Testament "so often by the public profession of their obedience."⁶ The covenant and its renewal, to Bucer, is regulative for the reign of the Kingdom of Christ among men: "And in the texts of Deut. chs. 29 and 31, it must be espe-

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*, 188.

3 *Ibid.*, 225 ff.

4 *Ibid.*, 225.

5 *Ibid.*, 228. Bucer adds: "In this way we read that John and the apostles conferred Baptism and received men into the Kingdom of Christ (Matt. 3: 11ff.; Mark 1: 4-5; Luke 3: 16-21; Acts 2: 38-41, 16: 15, and 19: 4-5)."

6 *Ibid.*, 229.

cially observed that the Lord wished the covenant to be renewed with his people every seventh year, and in the presence of the women and children.”¹ No citizen is received into the commonwealth, nor into any legitimate partnership, “unless he swears and promises with his own lips the things that pertain to a good citizen or partner.”² The covenant and its renewal, therefore, is of fundamental importance in the Christian commonwealth.³

Bucer's integration of magisterial office and the Biblical covenant has the following most important consequences for the Christian commonwealth:

(1) Political rulers have a most important duty towards the restoration of the religious duties of the bishops and the clergy. Citing numerous Old Testamentary texts, Bucer concludes that it is within the king's official capacity to undertake the renewal of the important priestly order and office, “just as the care for other estates and offices is within his prerogative”.⁴

(2) The Kingdom of Christ must be reformed by devout persuasion and an accurate preaching of the gospel, rather than by decrees – pious kings and princes, acting with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, once used this approach successfully in restoring the Kingdom of Christ among their subjects.⁵ Once the covenant of the Lord has been renewed and the laws of God accepted, it is indeed within the province of pious kings and princes to allow none of their subjects to violate this covenant openly or transgress these laws. This means that pious princes must plant and propagate the Kingdom of Christ also by the power of the sword, as by all powers which they have received from the Lord.”⁶

(3) Bucer's views on the covenant took him beyond Zwingli's theological theory on the Christian community in so far as Bucer distinguished between two covenants. Firstly, there is the religious covenant, sealed by the sacraments of baptism, and secondly there is the political covenant binding political rulers to God and their subjects. Both covenants are based on and flowing from God's dealing with his people through the Biblical covenant. In the case of the first covenant, it fulfils much the same role as the covenant in Zwingli's theology, being a covenant of unity forming the basis of the Christian commonwealth, constituting the political order.

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, 267.

5 *Ibid.*, 271ff.

6 *Ibid.*, 272. This entails that it is also their duty not to tolerate anyone who openly opposes and undermines the sound doctrine of the gospel.”

(4) The covenant brings together ecclesiastical and political bodies. At the heart of the church is the covenant between God and his people, the New Testament, proclaimed in Word and sacrament alike.¹ The sacrament of baptism receives into and seals the subjects of Christ for His Kingdom, gathers them into his congregation, bringing them together in his name, “and to be ruled by his ministers by means of certain covenants and sacraments of an eternal nature”. Bucer adds that Christ cleanses his subjects from sins through his sacraments according to the hidden counsel of his eternal election, and he gives a new and eternal life beyond the power of the earthly kings. In holy baptism all are incorporated into the Kingdom of Christ and pledge themselves to its obedience.² God once commanded all the sons to be circumcised, whether freeborn or slave, in order that they should observe all his religious laws, so he wills now that all should be baptized and then be taught under the discipline of the church whatever he has commanded. Through baptism, as a sign of the covenant, men must be washed from sins, regenerated and renewed for eternal life, incorporated in Christ the Lord, and clothed with him, and all of these things are reserved only to those chosen for eternal life. As sign of the covenant, the baptizing of infants of believers, the Word of God manifests its sufficiency: “I will be your God and of your seed.” Baptism, therefore, is the outward manifestation of the fulfilment of the conditions for being accepted into the Christian commonwealth – the sign of the covenant between God and his subjects in the *respublica Christiana*.³

(5) The political covenant is expressive of the preparation made for the restitution of Christ's Kingdom. A renewal of this covenant of the Lord and acceptance of the laws of God, carries the correlative obligations on political rulers to prevent their subjects from violating the covenant openly or transgressing the laws of God. The implications of the renewal of the covenant are twofold: Firstly, the repair of the kingdom of Christ among the subjects must be accomplished by the plain and industrious preaching of the gospel; secondly, to plant and propagate the Kingdom of Christ by the power of the sword, “as by all the powers which they have received from the Lord, it is also their duty not to tolerate anyone who openly opposes and undermines the sound doctrine of the gospel”.⁴

1 See the remarks by Peter Matheson, “Martin Bucer and the Old Church” in D.F. Wright, *Martin Bucer Reforming Church and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5-16, at 9.

2 *Ibid.*, 182.

3 *Ibid.*, 236.

4 *Ibid.*, 272.

(6) The renewal of the covenant brings about close cooperation between political and ecclesiastical authorities. It means supporting the church in preaching the gospel, and using magisterial office to oppose those who oppose and undermine the sound doctrine of the gospel.¹ In his *De Regno Christi* Bucer, by implication, asserts that the Lord's covenant is only established by political rulers once consent has been given for the full reception of Christ's Kingdom, and men have been chosen and sent to individual assemblies to advocate and commend in the name of the political authority the reformation of the churches.² After this covenant has been once more received and established by the supreme authority of the realm, it will be the duty of the political ruler to sanction this covenant with holy laws and just provisions against its violators, "and to preserve this most vigilantly and constantly", and he "will then zealously sanction, indeed, restore among his subjects, the laws that Almighty God established concerning the care and preservation of Christ's religion ..."³

(7) The restoration of the political covenant in the realm demands a system of law to govern the Christian Republic. Bucer identifies fourteen categories of laws for administering the covenantal values in the Christian commonwealth.⁴ The first of these categories deals with baptism in the Christian community. Just as all members of the Christian commonwealth have been made members of Christ's Kingdom and then received the covenant of eternal salvation, so the political ruler will make a law that orders parents to educate and establish their children in Christ's faith and obedience with great care, with just penalties appointed for those who infect their children with either false doctrine or bad morals.⁵ Furthermore, they must teach them the Church's catechism, for "unless the foundation of the Church is firmly laid in early childhood through the catechism of Christ, its upbuilding will proceed very poorly from then on."⁶ For those who do not, with utmost zeal, instruct and train those whom they have consecrated to Christ "the Lord in Baptism expose themselves to dire retribution" because "those who neglect this when it is in their control

1 *Ibid.*, 279. In his *Von der waren Seelsorge (On the true Care for the Soul)* (1538), Bucer tends to subject ecclesiastical institutions to political bodies (Bucer, *Over de ware zielzorg (On the true Care for the Soul)* translated by H.J. Selderhuis (Kampen: Uitgeverij De Groot Goudriaan, 1991), 102, 103.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, 280.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, 280.

6 *Ibid.*

snatch back the children whom they have consecrated to the Lord and hand them over to the dominion of Satan.”¹

(8) Whoever holds the external and political power among the people of Christ (in the *respublica Christiana*) will not only not tolerate any manifest neglect of pure religion among his subjects who are consecrated by baptism to Christ the Lord, much less any vice or attempted opposition to him in word or deed; but he will also see to it, first and foremost, that the churches have suitable ministers; they will also make sure that there are many schools of learning and piety, that all who have been destined for this by God are instructed and trained in them for these ministers of the churches, and that God's law is enforced in the Christian commonwealth.² This vision of a truly Christian ordered-society, according to Wright, in whose creation political authority and ecclesiastical bodies co-operated, demanded an ecclesiology which not only reckoned with the independence of the church, but was also based on the responsibility of every Christian.

5. Conclusion

The development of Reformational political theology from Luther to Bucer, saw the gradual integration of the conception of the office of magistracy with the idea of the Biblical covenant. This fusion started with Luther's formulation of the spiritual bond between ecclesiastical and political offices in society, on the basis of the sacrament of baptism. From the Lutheran Reformation via Zwingli's consolidation of the Christian commonwealth through the unifying power of baptism, to Bucer's *respublica Christiana* Reformational theological federalism saw the gradual emergence of the concept of the political covenant as the basis of political legitimacy of the Christian polity. If Zwingli's idea of the Biblical covenant produced what Scott A. Gillies in a recent study describes as “(o)ne people and one church existing under one covenant”³, Bucer was responsible for the idea of the united Christian republic based on the covenant.

The development of theologico-political federalism provided the bridge between the Swiss and German non-Lutheran reformers. Through Basel, Strasburg was linked to the Zurich reformers and gradually moved away from the Lutherans. The major differences between them and the Lutherans were expressed in covenantal terms and reflected the foundations of

1 *Ibid.*

2 *Ibid.*, 386.

3 "Zwingli and the Origin of the Reformed Covenant 1524-7," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (Number 1 2002): 21-50, at 50.

covenantal polities – stronger civil government and a greater role for the civil magistrates, more republican “rather than princely polities.”¹

From Strasburg the idea of federal theology and theologico-political federalism was taken to Augsburg, Herborn, Muhlhausen and Emden, as well as the Scottish and English Reformations. Within a hundred years after Bucer's vision of a consolidated *respublica Christiana*, political covenantalism became a most influential political paradigm in both the Scottish and Heidelberg Reformations.² Bucer's ideal of the *respublica Christiana*, although described as being “utopian”,³ and “chimerical as that of Petrarch had been when he recommended to the emperor Charles IV the restoration of ancient Rome”,⁴ fused the contributions of the German and Zurich Reformations into an ideal which proved to be one of the most dynamic and influential political forces of the 17th and 18th centuries in Western Europe.

1 Elazar, *Covenant and Commonwealth*, 194.

2 See A.W.G. Raath and S.A. de Freitas, “Theologico-Political Federalism: The Office Of Magistracy And The Legacy Of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575),” *WTJ* 63 (2001), 285-04.

3 Pauck, ed., *De Regno Christi*, 164 n. 16.

4 Wendel, ed., *De Regno Christi*, xxxix.