



Abstract from Article

THE QUEST FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE COVENANT AND THE GLORY OF MAGISTRACY: ZURICH AND THE DUTCH SECOND REFORMATION

Andries Raath

Published: *Journal for Christian Scholarship*, 3rd&4th quarter, (2003), 1-30

Abstract

The first systematic exposition of the Reformed perspectives on magistracy was contained in the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger's (1504 - 1575) *Decades* (1549 - 1551), a comprehensive overview of the main points of magisterial office, based on the idea of the Biblical covenant. The two main points of Bullinger's theses on magistracy concerned the distinction between the person of the magistrate and the office of magistracy, and secondly, magisterial office based on the Biblical covenant. Bullinger's views on magistracy and political theology were mostly contained in the second *Decade*, particularly his commentaries on the fifth and sixth precepts of the Ten Commandments. The lucid style which focused mostly on matters of a practical nature and his main ideas on magistracy immediately appealed to the hearts and minds of both academics and laymen alike. Although John Calvin (1509 - 1564) systemized the main tenets of the Zurich Reformed views on magistracy, he provided a rather over condensed summary of these ideas in the fourth volume of his *Institutes*. Not only did he underplay the foundational role of the covenant in Reformed politics, but he also did not cover the Biblical qualifications for magistracy and the role of the judiciary in the public sphere. The irony, however, is that it was not the more elaborate Zurich discourse on magistracy that impacted upon the Reformed world of the post 1550's, but Calvin's abridged restatement separated from its covenantal moorings. In 1563 Zacharias Ursinus (1534 - 1583), a student of Bullinger, in collaboration with Caspar Olevianus (1536 - 1587), produced the *Heidelberg Catechism*, an educational tool for strengthening the Reformed doctrine, and systematically articulating the Reformed faith. In his commentary on the Catechism, Ursinus reverted to the Zurich views of Bullinger on both the covenant (Question 18) and the nature of magisterial office (Questions 101 and 104). At the Synod of Dordrecht (1618/19), the Catechism obtained official recognition as one of the Reformed confessions of faith and with the dawn of Reformed pietism, after the Synod of Dordrecht, became one of the foundations of the Dutch Second Reformation. Foremost was the practical content of the Catechism which provided a valuable connecting point in the quest for piety, and the promotion of an experiential covenantal Reformed theology. In the Dutch Second Reformation, political theology strove towards restoring the Biblical covenant and regaining the glory of magistracy as envisaged by Bullinger, Ursinus and his pupil David Pareus (1548 - 1622). These endeavors, in a certain sense, cemented the Zurich perspectives on the covenant and the office of magistracy as pillars of Reformed politics, for the same reason that English Puritanism also had the objective "to make the wondrous truths of Scripture, rediscovered in the Reformation; a vibrant reality in the hearts and lives of ministers and parishioners alike, and thus strive for a genuine piety issuing forth from a life of intimate fellowship with God." The implications of these developments are twofold: firstly, care should be exercised not to overplay the role, impact and influence of Calvin's views on politics, contained in Book 4 of his *Institutes* within the

Reformed world, and secondly, the Dutch Second Reformation deserves much more attention in Reformed political studies because of its role as a conduit through which the impact of Zurich political theology made itself felt on the European continent.

All content copyright © 2006 De Freitas & Raath. All rights reserved. No duplication is permitted in any form without obtaining prior written consent from the authors. Please visit <http://www.christianlaw.co.za> for additional abstracts and articles related to biblical political and constitutional theory.