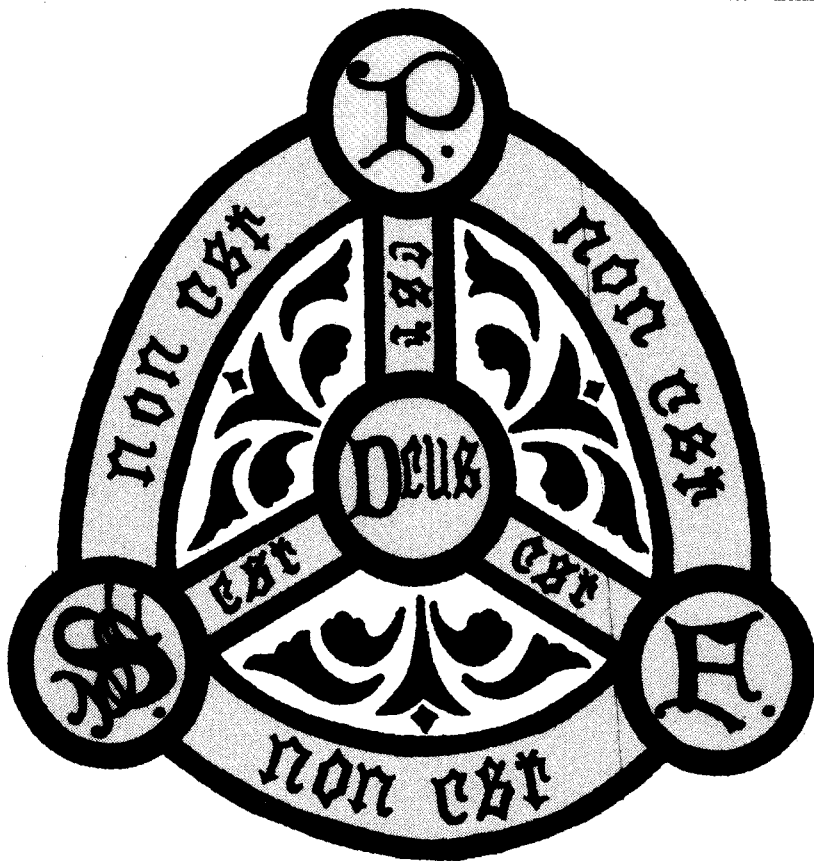


Christian and Reformed Today



John Bolt

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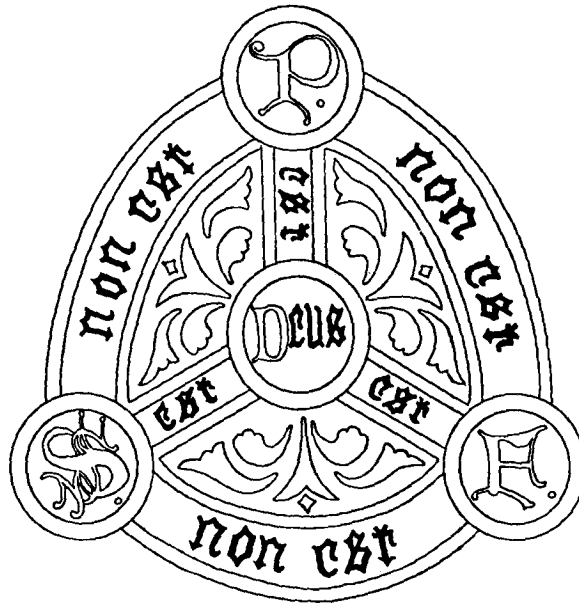
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**Christian
and Reformed
Today**

Explanation of the cover symbol: The Shield of the Holy Trinity

This design, found chiefly in stained glass of medieval churches, expresses the fundamental Christian conviction about the triune mystery. Positively, two parallel affirmations are made about what each member of the Godhead is (est). When read from the center circle outward, three statements: "God (Deus) is Father" (P for Pater); "God is Son" (F for Filius); and "God is Holy Spirit" (S for Spiritus Sanctus). When read from the outer circles inward, three parallel statements: "The Father is God"; "The Son is God"; and "The Holy Spirit is God." Negatively, parallel affirmations are also made about what each member of the Godhead is not (non est). When read clockwise and counter-clockwise on the outer circles and bands the non-identity of the three persons of the Trinity is affirmed: "The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit"; "The Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit"; "The Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son."

Christian and Reformed Today



John Bolt

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*For Michelle, David and Justin
Partly to fulfill the trust of Psalm 78:1-4*

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“The thoughtful person places the doctrine of the trinity in the very center of the full-orbed life of nature and mankind. The mind of the Christian is not satisfied until every form of existence has been referred to the triune God and until the confession of the trinity has received the place of prominence in our thought and life.”

—*Herman Bavinck*

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my thanks to the York (Maranatha), Waterdown (Bethel), and London (Bethel) Christian Reformed Churches in Ontario, Canada for the invitations to present the four lectures on what it means to be Reformed in the fall of 1982 and the spring and fall of 1983 respectively.

Although they have been rewritten somewhat, those four lectures essentially constitute the first four chapters of this book. I have deliberately maintained the somewhat informal and popular style that is characteristic of oral address. The desire to explore Reformed roots and the enthusiasm for the Reformed faith manifested by those present at these lectures was very heartening to me and the discussions which followed were very stimulating. The chapter on Christian education (Chapter 6) contains material which was initially given at a conference of Christian school administrators in Paris, Ontario in the fall of 1982 and subsequently to several gatherings of Christian school teachers, and other material given at a C.A.R.F.A. (Canadian Association for Reformed Faith and Action) workshop in Crieff, Ontario in April 1983. Also in-

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cluded is material presented to parent/teacher groups in St. Catharines, and Toronto, Ontario in April 1983 and February 1984 respectively. My sincere thanks to the many who have dialogued with me about the matter of Christian education. I hope that what I have learned in those exchanges is reflected in this rewritten chapter. The last chapter on Reformed ethics consists of a speech given at the All-Ontario Ministers Conference, held at Redeemer College in Hamilton, Ontario in April, 1983. To preserve the argument there I have kept this speech intact as delivered although readers will recognize some overlap in thought and expression with earlier chapters in this book.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks publicly to my colleagues at Redeemer College who have read or heard the material in this book and have during our two years together discussed and debated with me what it means to be Reformed along with a host of other related issues. On some issues I have listened and made changes, on others it will be apparent that I have stubbornly gone my own way and for that I accept full responsibility. My thanks also to Sylvia Keesmaat, my student assistant, who typed the final draft of the manuscript and helped prepare the index.

1.

Introduction

All Christians have an obligation to re-examine and on occasion to restate even their most fundamental and cherished convictions. Scripture itself demands such re-evaluation (and restatement) and the world's pressure makes it inevitable. In the various branches of Christendom that are relatively small and also very self-conscious about their distinct identity there is yet another reason for reconsideration and restatement. Such churches are often born out of controversy and conflict with another member of the same family of churches. While the generation that gives birth to and experiences the conflict needs no further justification for its separate existence, subsequent generations do. The question arises: how are "we" different from "them" and are those differences significant enough to justify our separate existence?

It may be helpful to mention the concrete occasion which gave rise to this book. The church of which I am a member, the Christian Reformed Church, was one hundred and twenty-five years old in 1982. That anniversary was an appropriate occasion once again to pause and reflect on what it means to be a Reformed Christian

(Reformed as well as Christian) person today. After all, the Christian Reformed Church was born out of a conflict with another *Reformed* denomination, the Reformed Church in America.* The division of 1857 is an unalterable fact of history and in my judgment a fact simply to be acknowledged rather than triumphantly celebrated or tearfully lamented by members of the Christian Reformed Church. Christian humility and an honest awareness of the limitations and weaknesses of the Christian Reformed Church rules out the former. A proper appreciation of God's blessing upon and use in His kingdom of the Christian Reformed Church in its distinctiveness makes the latter seem an expression of ingratitude.

However, the *fact* of these two *Reformed* denominations in North America, one a daughter of the other, demands consideration and reflection. What does it really mean to be Reformed? How can the reformation of the church continue? After all *ecclesia reformata reformanda est* (the reformed church must continually be reforming).

I should say at the outset that this little volume is not in any sense intended as an *apologia* for the separate existence of the Christian Reformed Church or any other Reformed denomination. Whatever the Lord has in store for the various Reformed communities in North America, I do not consider it my place here to judge the validity of their separate existences. It is my intention rather to reflect and I hope to shed some light upon what it is that characterizes our mutual Reformed heritage. I am fully aware that my own perspective on that heritage is colored by the distinctively Christian Reformed glasses I wear to see it. This will become especially apparent in the next chapter and in the chapter on Christian education (Chapter 6). I do not apologize for that—I simply note it as a fact. However, I have tried to avoid provincial, strictly Christian Re-

* I am of course using the current names of both churches.

formed “in house” discussions and focus on broad issues that arise out of and are common to the Reformed tradition in general. Some of the examples I use of course do arise out of Christian Reformed history and experience because it is what I know best. My love and appreciation for that Reformed tradition and the Christian Reformed Church in particular will be apparent in this volume and that does bring with it the danger of a proud, sectarian party-spirit. Such a spirit is of course sin even when, as is often the case, it is born out of ignorance of other Christian traditions. I have honestly tried to be as affirming of the Reformed tradition as I could without being smug and triumphalistic. If I have not entirely succeeded in that, let me here express my regrets.

In that connection a word is in order about the title of this volume. I have deliberately chosen the title “Christian *and* Reformed Today” rather than simply “Christian Reformed Today”. For one thing I would hardly presume to speak on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church. Even if it had been officially commissioned by the Christian Reformed Church, which it is not, this little volume would still be one person’s vision of what it means to be Reformed and Christian today. Another reason is the obvious fact that the terms “Christian” and “Reformed” are not exactly synonyms: Christian Reformed people are Christian first and Reformed second. While I will argue that to be Reformed is to be nothing more or less than truly Christian, it is of course only proper to acknowledge the obvious fact that there are many Christians who do not consider themselves part of the Reformed family of churches. As important, however, is my hope that the reflections on the Reformed heritage presented in this volume may serve as an occasion for reflection within and dialogue with the several other Reformed churches in North America and not be restricted to the Christian Reformed Church. Beyond that it may also be a useful tool to introduce the Reformed Calvinist tradition to non-Reformed Christians.

One final introductory comment. Some readers may be surprised that certain important Reformed doctrinal emphases (such as scripture, election, covenant, and kingdom) are dealt with rather briefly in this volume. I recognize that and my only response is that this volume is not to be seen as a complete book of dogmatics but rather as an attempt to penetrate to the heart of the Reformed vision. For that reason it will become clear that chapters three, four and five ought to be considered as one piece rather than autonomous units. To read any one of these three chapters in isolation would distort the overall portrait of the Reformed vision which I am trying to paint.

After I had given the lectures on what it means to be Reformed and before the final preparation of this manuscript for publication, I had the opportunity to read I. John Hesselink's recently published book *On Being Reformed*.¹ Hesselink's approach differs significantly from that which I have used in this book; he attempts to remove no less than twelve common misunderstandings about the Reformed tradition before trying to summarize what is distinctive about the Reformed tradition. The approach and content of our two volumes overlap very little. Hesselink's volume is informative and readable and I heartily recommend it for further reading on what it means to be Reformed. It also contains a most useful annotated bibliography for more specialized reading.

Note

1. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983.

2.

What Does It Mean to Be Reformed?

What does it mean to be Reformed? That question and the variety of answers given to it have been the source of much passionate debate in the history of the family of churches that came forth from the Calvinist branch of the Protestant Reformation, churches that came to be known as Reformed. It is worth recalling that already in the sixteenth century what the reformers saw as reform and renewal was considered by the Roman Catholic Church as a heretical and schismatic deviation from holy mother Church. This phenomenon has been repeated throughout the history of the Reformed churches as movements for further reformation and renewal arose. Repeatedly a given established Reformed church faced the accusation that it was no longer true to the Reformed heritage and was called to return to it. Repeatedly the accused church ignored or dismissed such charges and in its refusal gave birth to a new Reformed Church which then considered itself to be the “true” bearer of the Reformed faith.* History

* This phenomenon is of course not limited to the Reformed family of churches but can be found in any ecclesial community, be it Lutheran, Wesleyan, Baptist or Pentecostal.

shows, however, that there is little unanimity in such protest. Not all are agreed as to what constitutes the genius of the Reformed tradition. A brief look at the history of the Christian Reformed Church is instructive here.

The Problem of Definition

The history of the Christian Reformed Church is marked by a passionate concern for maintaining the Reformed heritage. She was born out of protest against the alleged inadequate Reformed character of the Reformed Church in America and has had to sustain in her short history several protests against her own alleged departure from that tradition. In 1924, the Rev. Herman Hoeksema and a band of followers left the Christian Reformed Church, convinced that the doctrine of common grace which had been affirmed by the 1924 Christian Reformed Synod was not Reformed, and founded the Protestant Reformed Church. Here "Reformed" was primarily a matter of correct doctrine and the debate whether "common grace" is or is not a Reformed doctrine. In the wave of Dutch immigrants who came to Canada in the 1950's were a number who had experienced the tragic division of 1944 in the Dutch *Gereformeerde Kerken*. Many felt that the continued close relationship of the Christian Reformed Church in North America with the *Gereformeerde Kerken* meant that the Christian Reformed Church was no longer a true Reformed Church and formed the Canadian Reformed Church. Here "Reformed" was less a matter of doctrine than a matter of church polity or government. In that same wave of immigrants were many "Kuyperian" Calvinists who were convinced that the Christian Reformed Church in general, and its official school Calvin College in particular, were no longer true to the Reformed *cultural* vision promoted by the great Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper. This gave birth to an alternative Reformed educational movement, the Association for Reformed Scientific

Studies (ARSS) (later the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACS), and now the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS)). "Reformed" in this instance was neither a matter of doctrine or church polity, but primarily of a socio-cultural worldview.

The concern about the Reformed character of the Christian Reformed Church remains a live issue. Since 1970, there have been numerous published statements with the general title "Out of Concern for the Church." There have been Christian Reformed ministers who urged churches under their charge to separate themselves from the sinful decisions of the Christian Reformed Church and subsequently resigned to form their own denominations when the church did not accede to their particular requests for reform. Since 1970, at least two new denominations, the Christian Reformation Church and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church have been formed by disgruntled Christian Reformed ministers. In a variety of ways, numerous warnings about the imminent danger of the Christian Reformed Church's forsaking its precious Reformed heritage continue to be sent to the Christian Reformed constituency by way of its several publications. In the fall of 1982, a new seminary, the Mid-America Reformed Seminary (MARS), opened its doors to students. The rise of MARS is part of a deliberate protest against Calvin, the official theological seminary of the Christian Reformed Church, and its alleged departure from the Reformed tradition.

This brief overview is sufficient, I believe, to demonstrate the need for clarifying what it means to be Reformed. One sometimes has the impression that the term "Reformed" is a nice convenient term used by anyone who happens to disagree with certain ecclesiastical decisions and wants to rally some followers around him. Are all who say to us "Reformed, Reformed," truly Reformed? How can we tell?

It is important, I believe, to put the concern for being Reformed in some historical perspective.

Sometimes one gets the impression from critics of the Christian Reformed Church that it has lost its moorings only since 1972, when the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted the controversial report on the Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority (Report 36/44). Report 36/44 has proven to be a popular culprit and convenient whipping boy for critics of the Christian Reformed Church. However, the concern and question as to the Reformed character of the Christian Reformed Church are not new. Already in 1926, the Rev. R.B. Kuiper, then pastor of the La Grave Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote a substantial volume entitled *As To Being Reformed*.¹ The work was intended as “an appeal to the members of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church to continue soundly Reformed or to become more so.” Kuiper, ordained in 1912 as a minister in the Christian Reformed Church, had just spent two years (1923-25) in the Reformed Church in America as a pastor of the Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. It was his reflection upon this experience in particular that impressed upon him, to use his own words, **“The imminent peril in which we American Calvinists are of losing our precious reformed heritage and the supreme importance of our holding it fast.”**² After a long career as a pastor, President of Calvin College (1930-33), Professor of Theology at Westminster Seminary (1933-52), and President of Calvin Seminary (1952-56), Kuiper wrote a second volume which was published in 1959 under the title *To Be Or Not To Be Reformed*.³ In this volume, too, he insisted that the Christian Reformed Church “must cling tooth and nail to its Reformed patrimony and must refuse steadfastly to sell even a portion of its Reformed birthright.”⁴ Stirring words indeed, but the question lingers—what exactly does it mean to be Reformed?

There is another reason for pausing to reflect upon the term “Reformed” as it is used in the names of many

denominations, namely, that most non-Dutch people simply don't know what to do with it. Outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where there are more than one hundred Christian Reformed and Reformed Churches within shouting distance of each other, where is the newspaper that knows the proper name of the Christian or Canadian or Free Reformed and not the Christian or Canadian or Free Reform Church? Does anybody "out there" know that many Reformed people send their children to Christian, parentally-controlled day schools and not to Dutch "reform" schools as if they were *all* juvenile delinquents? Is the word "Reformed" still a useful, clarifying designation in North America or should we perhaps all just become Presbyterians?

One final question related to the need for defining "Reformed:" Isn't it enough just to be Christian? After all, we are saved by Jesus Christ and not by John Calvin. Do we really need to stop and reflect upon "Christian" and "Reformed" today? Isn't "Christian" enough? For now I offer a brief and admittedly inadequate answer to that question. It is important for Reformed people to reflect upon what it means to be "Reformed" because that is their God-given heritage. It is interesting, important, even necessary for Reformed Christians to explore their Reformed roots. After the reader has finished with this volume I hope it will have become clear that the reason for exploring that heritage is more than just historical and that the Reformed, Calvinist tradition has a distinctive and positive contribution to make to world Christianity, but for now I will leave it at that.

Before I spell out concretely what I consider to be the heart of the Reformed vision of Christianity, it is useful to note briefly some additional difficulties in attempting to define what it is to be Reformed. In North America those who use the name "Reformed" to designate their church fellowships must realize that for the most part their perspective is limited in the first place by the decidedly Dutch background and character of

their Reformedness. In North America by far the majority of Christian churches who have their roots in the Calvinist branch of the Protestant Reformation are designated as “Presbyterian” rather than “Reformed.” One is particularly struck by this fact when reading John Leith’s *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*.⁵ Leith is a Southern American Presbyterian who wrote a significant volume on the Reformed tradition while hardly considering the Dutch Reformed tradition at all. Imagine a whole book on the Reformed tradition which makes no mention of Groen van Prinsterer, has but one short paragraph on Abraham Kuyper, and relegates Herman Bavinck and G.C. Berkouwer to an appendix which merely lists some representative Reformed theologians. For those raised in the Dutch Christian Reformed tradition that would be unthinkable. No wonder Leith acknowledges in a footnote that the Dutch Reformed theological tradition “receives inadequate treatment in this book”.⁶ Yet this serves to remind Reformed, Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed Christians that they are not the only branches on the Reformed or Calvinist tree. Not all who say “Reformed, Reformed” are originally Dutch. It is somewhat sobering to note that a list of the member churches in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches includes some one hundred and fifty churches spread over every continent and includes both the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada while the Christian Reformed Church, for example, is not even a member of the World Alliance.⁷

Reformed Christians need to remind themselves therefore that the Reformed, Calvinist tradition took hold in countries other than the Netherlands, countries such as Hungary, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, England, Scotland, Romania, Ireland, and in its own distinctive way, in the United States of America. Whether under the name “Reformed” or “Presbyterian” the Calvinist/Reformed Reformation spread extensively across Europe, the British Isles and

into the New World. We must also remember that these geographical families of Reformed/Presbyterian churches, rooted in a variety of confessional as well as ethnic traditions, can be found all over the world in Latin America, Africa, and Australasia, as well as in Europe and North America. Whenever primarily Dutch Christian and Reformed people ponder the meaning of their “Reformedness,” they do well to keep it in that perspective.

Even when we remain within the family of Dutch Reformed churches, however, we see how difficult it is to define “Reformed.” In addition to the Christian Reformed, Reformed, Canadian Reformed, and Protestant Reformed denominations in America, there are also the Netherlands Reformed, Free Reformed, and Orthodox Christian Reformed churches. All these churches have a confessional tradition in common, namely the three forms of unity, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. Yet each is distinctive in its particular Reformedness and one or more can often be found accusing another of not being fully Reformed.

One final complication. The word “Reformed” as I have been using it in this chapter refers specifically to the historical branch of the Calvinist Protestant Reformation. There are also Reformed Baptist, Reformed Episcopal (Anglican), Reformed Evangelical, Reformed Mennonite, Reformed Methodist churches and even a Reformed Sons of Freedom (Doukhobour) church. No wonder non-Reformed Christians, not to mention non-Christians, find it hard to keep it all straight.

A Suggested Definition

What this all leads to, of course, is the question of what determines and who finally decides what is “Reformed.” Is the Reformed distinctiveness to be found in doctrine, the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, or the doctrine of election perhaps? Is it to be found in the distinctively presbyterian form of church government?

Or is it merely a historical designation so that all churches which have a historical link to John Calvin, no matter what they believe now, can be called Reformed? Should we then decide what is Reformed by taking yet another gallup poll to determine what Reformed people believe today and simply consider that Reformed? In the face of conflicts and differences, who decides what is crucial to that Reformed tradition and what is not?

I believe that there is a definite and distinctive Reformed tradition in which certain doctrines and teachings (theology) as well as a certain practice of life (ethics) can be identified. Drawing from the three great Reformed thinkers whom I know best, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck, as well as from the Reformed Confessions, I would suggest the following as a definition of "Reformed": **A Reformed person is trinitarian in theology and catholic in vision.**

This definition is perhaps not immediately obvious or self-evident even to those who know the Reformed tradition well. The sovereignty of God, the scripture principle (*sola scriptura*, by scripture alone), the covenant or the kingdom of God, and the presbyterian order of church government are more commonly hailed as the distinctive traits of Calvinism. My choice for the two key terms "trinitarian" and "catholic" does not so much stem from my disagreement with these other emphases but rather from an attempt to expose the *material* thread that ties them all together. Brief reflection on the other possibilities may help to illumine that concern.

The sovereignty of God is the characteristic emphasis most often ascribed to Calvinism. However, Judaism and Islam are no less theocentric than is Calvinism. The danger of simply asserting the sovereignty of God as the distinctive element of Calvinism is that sovereignty in the Christian and Reformed tradition is never just sovereignty as such. Sovereignty must always be understood in a trinitarian, kingdom, covenantal, gracious, and eschatological framework. It is the

sovereignty of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier—that is being affirmed. Similarly, the Scripture principle is acknowledged even by such sectarian groups as Jehovah's Witnesses (one of the most orthodox statements on biblical inerrancy that I have on file came from the Watchtower Society!). The *formal* principle, *sola* and *tota* scripture (which I shall discuss in greater length in Chapter 3) is thus of vital importance but it is not enough—one needs in addition to spell out the *material* content of that affirmation. What is the nature, the content of Scripture's message? Finally, other options such as the kingdom of God and the covenant are, in my judgment, themselves subordinate to the trinitarian and catholic emphasis that I am suggesting. They simply give further specificity to it. The king and covenant maker is none other than the triune God. I therefore reiterate: **A Reformed person is trinitarian in theology and catholic in vision.** But this definition too has its difficulties.

It is true, of course, that all orthodox Christianity, that is to say all Christianity which continues to affirm the creeds and councils of the early church, is trinitarian. The Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches as well as the major Protestant denominations are all explicitly trinitarian in their doctrine. Therefore, two things must be noted here. Reformed Christianity purports to be nothing more or less than authentic orthodox, catholic Christianity. In other words Reformed Christianity is self-consciously non-sectarian. It affirms its links with the apostolic Christian faith in all ages. In his own inimitable fashion Abraham Kuyper put it thus: "In its deepest logic Calvinism had already been apprehended by Augustine; had long before Augustine been proclaimed to the City of the seven hills by the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans; and from Paul goes back to Israel and its prophets, yea to the tents of the patriarchs."⁸ What better way to assert the non-sectarian character of Calvinism than to insist that even Abraham was a Calvinist! Kuyper's statement, sug-

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gesting with delightful anachronism that the patriarchs were also Calvinists, brings up a sensitive matter that also arises from the definition of Reformed that I have given. I am implying that the doctrine of the trinity, properly understood, with all its implications, does not come into its own anywhere as clearly and consistently as it does in the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition, in other words, is orthodox trinitarian Christianity at its best. R.B. Kuiper stated it this way: "In a word, Calvinism is the most nearly perfect interpretation of Christianity. In final analysis Calvinism and Christianity are practically synonymous."⁹

Calvinism, the Purest Form of Christianity?

Such an assertion seems on the face of it presumptuous and arrogant and liable to much misunderstanding. It is not the sort of claim that goes over very well any longer in our ecumenical and tolerant age. Understandably, it offends non-Reformed Christians. It is a claim, however, that other Reformed thinkers have also made. Consider the following from the great Princeton theologian Benjamin Warfield:

Calvinism is not a specific variety of theism, religion, evangelicalism, set over against other specific varieties, which along with it constitute these several genera, and which possess equal rights of existence with it and make similar claims to perfection, each after its own kind. It differs from them not as one species differs from other species; but as a perfectly developed representative differs from an imperfectly developed representative of the same species. There are not many kinds of theism, religion, evangelicalism, among which men are at liberty to choose to suit at will their individual taste or meet their special need, all of which may be presumed to serve each its own specific uses equally worthily . . . Calvinism conceives of itself as simply the more pure theism, religion, evangelicalism, superseding as such the less pure.¹⁰

At the risk of adding insult to injury both Kuiper and Warfield speak of what we may call “anonymous Calvinists” or “implicit Calvinists,” insisting that all true Christians, whatever label they may bear, are at heart Calvinists. In Kuiper’s words: “There is truth in the oft repeated saying that an Arminian is a Calvinist when on his knees before God.”¹¹ Warfield puts it this way:

Whoever believes in God; whoever recognizes in the recesses of his soul his utter dependence on God; whoever in all his thought of salvation hears in his heart of hearts the echo of the *solī Deo gloria* of the evangelical profession—by whatever name he may call himself, or by whatever intellectual puzzles his logical understanding may be confused—Calvinism recognizes as implicitly a Calvinist, and as only requiring to permit these fundamental principles—which underlie and give its body to all true religion—to work themselves freely and fully out in thought and feeling and action, to become explicitly a Calvinist.¹²

One seldom hears such bold affirmations from Reformed people today. It is worth considering the reasons for this. Perhaps it is because we have come to recognize such claims as dangerously triumphalistic, even imperialistic, and in the interest of charity and humility wish to tone down our rhetoric. If that is the reason one can only applaud. No matter how dear Christians may hold their particular confessional and ecclesiastical tradition, pride and smug complacency are out of place. Reformed Christians must recognize that they do not have a corner on the truth, that they have much to learn from as well as contribute to other Christian traditions.

I fully share the aversion to untoward pride, yet I also wonder if the reason for the relative absence today of claims such as that of Kuiper and Warfield is that many Reformed people no longer know or value their own tradition. Many Christians simply view the plethora of

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ecclesial traditions and church denominations as a kind of smorgasbord in which personal preference and taste are the order of the day. Concern about the truth of doctrine or confession seems waning. If Christians no longer value their own tradition, often because they do not know its true genius, they cannot be convinced of its being the purest and truest expression of Christianity. And if that is the case, a question of conscience arises—why be Reformed (or Lutheran or Methodist or Roman Catholic) rather than something else? The answer all too often is one of mere historical accident—it's the group into which I was born.

What I am suggesting, in short, is that while we may wish to tone down the potentially triumphalistic rhetoric of Kuiper and Warfield, we ought not to overlook the inner truth of their assertions. Reformed Christians ought to prize and value their own tradition. While they can and must learn from others, they also have an obligation to explore, as well as humbly and critically to work with the heritage of the Reformation that has been entrusted to them. That is at least one valid implication drawn from the parable of the talents. There exists therefore an obligation first of all to know what it means to be Reformed.

A Balanced Trinitarian Christianity

To come now to the heart of the matter, I am suggesting that to be Reformed is to be fully trinitarian. It is worth noting here that there are Christian traditions which are indeed trinitarian, but which put the accent on one of the persons of the Trinity or upon one of the three articles of the creed. The Heidelberg Catechism in its reflection upon the Apostles' Creed notes that the articles of the Creed are divided into three parts: first, God the Father and our creation; second, God the Son and our redemption; third, God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification (Lord's Day 8, Question & Answer 24).

If we stop to reflect on this division, it becomes ap-

parent that different Christian groups and traditions emphasize one of the persons of the Trinity and the corresponding article of the creed often at the expense of the others. For example, what is often referred to as fundamentalist Christianity clearly focuses its attention on the second article of the creed and the work of Jesus Christ in salvation. Wherever one finds an almost exclusive emphasis upon devotion to Jesus, upon the salvation of one's soul, upon missions and evangelism, there one has second article Christianity. It is worth noting that second article Christianity can be either liberal or conservative. In the latter, Jesus is the one who saves our soul from damnation; in the former, He is the example or model of what it means to be fully human. In both cases however, it is Jesus and the salvation He provides which are the heart of Christianity. The role of God the Father and the doctrine of creation hardly come into their own. Creation or nature is simply the arena from which salvation in Christ provides the escape.

Other Christian traditions, such as the Methodist and Pentecostal, emphasize in different ways the work of the Holy Spirit and sanctification. The Pentecostal tradition emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit within man as it leads to the manifestation of spiritual gifts such as tongue speaking, prophecy and healing. The Methodist tradition especially emphasizes the work of the Spirit in making men holy, sanctified. The separateness of a Christian style of life, a concern with avoiding worldliness is the chief mark of such a Christianity.

It is in liberal, humanist Christianity that the first article referring to God the Father and creation dominates. God is the Father of the entire brotherhood of all men, and man is His noble, reasonable, responsible representative on earth who does not need salvation as much as he needs to accept and affirm his creaturely, human potential. Whenever one hears a "Christian" message with all the accent on achieving full, human, creaturely potential, then one is face to

face with a first article Christianity.

Now where does the Reformed tradition fit in this scheme? Does Reformed Christianity represent first, second or third article Christianity? Each of the portraits I have drawn represents, of course, a certain one-sidedness, and it is also obvious that to be fully Christian is to be trinitarian, first *and* second *and* third article. It is the Reformed tradition, I am suggesting, that is fully and properly trinitarian. There have been instances of predominantly first, second, or third article Christianities in the history of the Reformed Churches. There have been instances (e.g. in seventeenth-century Netherlands and among some of the followers of Abraham Kuyper) when the doctrine of creation and the enjoyment of this world led to worldliness, which evoked in turn, a pietist reaction emphasizing Jesus or the Spirit and holiness. But in its best representatives, the Reformed tradition has been fully trinitarian, emphasizing the value and worth of life in creation as a calling from God, the need for justification and salvation through Jesus Christ alone, as well as the importance of holy living.

The Priority of the Father and Creation

What does make Reformed trinitarian Christianity distinctive however, is that the Father and creation receive the pre-eminence. When speaking of the difference of tasks attributed to the three persons of the Trinity, Calvin puts it this way: "To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity."¹³

Abraham Kuyper summarizes this difference in economy or activity of the Trinity in a similar way: "We begin with the general distinction: That in every work effected by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in common,

the power *to bring forth* proceeds from the Father; the power *to arrange* from the Son; the power *to perfect* from the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ Kuyper cites as evidence the following passages: I Corinthians 8:6 (“There is one God, the Father, *from* whom are all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things and through whom we exist”) and Romans 11:36 (“For *from* Him and *through* Him and *to* Him are all things”). He then notes:

The operation here spoken of is threefold: first, that by which all things are originated (*of* Him); second, that by which all things consist (*through* Him); third, that by which all things attain their final destiny (*to* Him). In connection with this clear, apostolic distinction the great teachers of the Church, after the fifth century, used to distinguish the operations of the Persons of the Trinity by saying that the operation whereby all things originated proceeds from the Father; that whereby they received consistency from the Son; and that whereby they were led to their destiny from the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

It is thus apparent that there is an order of *activity* or *function* in the Trinity which in no way denies the equality of the persons of the Trinity in their *being*. In that order of activity the Father comes first. Kuyper puts it this way:

Thus the Father is *father*. He generates the Son. And the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Hence the peculiar feature of the First Person is evidently that He is the Source and Fountain not only of the material creation, but of its very conception; of all that was and is and ever shall be. The peculiarity of the Second Person lies evidently not in generating, but in being generated. One is a son by being generated. Hence since all things proceed from the Father, nothing can proceed from the *Son*. The source of all things is not in the Son. Yet He adds a work of creation

to that which is coming into existence; for the Holy Spirit proceeds also from Him; but not from Him alone, but from the Father and the Son, and that in such a way that the procession from the Son is due to His sameness of essence with the Father.¹⁶

Calvin too is not at all reluctant to speak of an *order* in God so that “the Father is thought of as first, then from Him the Son, and finally from both the Spirit. For the mind of each human being is naturally inclined to contemplate God first, then the wisdom coming forth from Him, and lastly the power whereby He executes the decrees of His plan.”

When Reformed trinitarian theology begins with the Father, this has some important implications. It means specifically that creation has priority over salvation, that salvation is not the escape from or elevation above creation but the *restoration* of creation. It means that the most important question in life is not, “What must I do to be saved,” but “How can I glorify God?” As the Westminster Catechism so beautifully states it, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” It means that the Reformed tradition places a great deal of emphasis upon the idea of vocation or calling, upon serving God *in* this world rather than escaping from it.

The second part of the suggested definition has already been hinted at, namely that a Reformed person is **catholic** in vision. The Reformed view of life in the world is dominated by the idea of God’s sovereignty over the entire cosmos. Abraham Kuyper in his *Lectures on Calvinism* put it this way: The dominating principle of Calvinism “was not, soteriologically, justification by faith, but in the widest sense cosmologically, *the sovereignty of the triune God over the whole cosmos*, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible.”¹⁸ That is what is meant by catholicity—the Reformed vision is cosmic or universal. The Reformed person is not satisfied with the salvation of his or her soul, as

crucial as that is to being a Christian. The kingdom of heaven, the great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck was fond of saying, is not only a pearl of great price, the treasure a man finds in a field and must obtain at all costs. It is that indeed, but it is also a leaven and a mustard seed which grows and expands. The gospel is a message for the *world* as well as for the individual.

For this reason, an excellent trinitarian definition of Christianity is the following from Herman Bavinck: "The essence of the Christian religion consists therein, that the creation of the Father, destroyed by sin, is again restored in the death of the Son of God, and recreated by the grace of the Spirit to a Kingdom of God."¹⁹ Whatever issue we confront as Christians, the education of our children, what our life's work should be and how we are to do it, what social, cultural, and political decisions and activities we must make and pursue, we must endeavor to place them in a trinitarian perspective. We must ask, how does this relate to creation, to the fall, and then to the saving and sanctifying work of the Son and the Spirit. A good example of that, although one can quarrel with its formulation, not to mention the conclusion, is the report on dancing submitted to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1980. The report asks three questions: 1) What is there about the dance that goes back to creation; 2) What impact did the fall have on dance; 3) How may Christians seek to redeem this area of life.²⁰ While more can be said about this issue, the basic perspective of the report as indicated by these questions is quite Reformed.

In the following three chapters the trinitarian framework suggested in this chapter will be developed further by considering in some detail each article of the creed on creation, redemption, and sanctification respectively. In conclusion, the basic perspective of a Reformed understanding of life in the world can be summarized by a phrase taken from the title of a book by Professor Richard Mouw of Calvin College. The title is *Called to Holy Worldliness*.²¹ We are called to be *in*

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the world but as a redeemed and holy people. That in a nutshell is the heart of the Reformed vision.

Notes

1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1926.
2. *Ibid.*, preface.
3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959.
4. *Ibid.*, preface.
5. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox, 1977.
6. *Ibid.*, n. 88, p. 236.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-64.
8. *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), p. 33.
9. *As To Being Reformed*, p. 88.
10. Cited by Kuiper, *ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
13. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX, XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.xiii.18.
14. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, translated by Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), p. 19.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.18.
18. *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 79.
19. *The Sacrifice of Praise*, translated by John Dolfin (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1922), p. 11.
20. *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church*, 1980, pp. 298-99.
21. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

3.

God the Father, Creation and Culture

In the previous chapter, the following definition was proposed for what it means to be Reformed: A Reformed person is **trinitarian** in theology and **catholic** in vision. While it is true that all orthodox Christianity purports to be trinitarian, it is in the Reformed tradition, it was argued, that this trinitarian emphasis comes truly into its own. The heart of the Reformed vision is the “sovereignty of the triune God over the whole cosmos.” The Reformed vision is thus catholic or universal; it is not only concerned with the salvation of the soul of man, but with the renewal of the whole fallen creation. The Reformed tradition is above all pre-occupied with God and His glory. The most important question it holds before us is not, “What must I do to be saved?”, but the more ultimate one, “How can I live unto the glory of God?” Man’s salvation has as its end goal a God-glorifying life in God’s world. God rather than man is the focus of attention.

The reason for this emphasis comes from the priority which Reformed theology gives to the work, if not the person, of God the Father and creation. Recall Calvin’s statement that because “to the Father is at-

tributed the beginning of activity” we can speak of an “order” in the Trinity where “the Father is thought of as first, then from Him the Son, and finally from both the Spirit.” Thus “the mind of each human being is naturally inclined to contemplate God (the Father) first, then the wisdom (the Son) coming forth from Him, and lastly the power (the Spirit) whereby He executes the decrees of His plan.”¹ If in other branches of Christianity God the Son and salvation or God the Holy Spirit and sanctification receive the pre-eminence, in the Reformed tradition both salvation and sanctification are given catholic or universal significance by subsuming them under the doctrine of creation and new creation. The whole creation is groaning under the burden of sin and awaits the day when it will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (see Romans 8:18-25). This overall perspective, it was argued, is what is distinctive about the Reformed tradition. Nowhere else does this emphasis, with all its implications for Christian living, come as clearly into its own.

The Scripture Principle

What is the reason for this emphasis in the Reformed tradition? It is a consequence of the distinctively Reformed approach to Scripture. As is well known, the Reformation of the sixteenth century is often characterized by the two slogans *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura*. Over against the medieval Roman Catholic emphasis upon the role of works, the Reformers proclaimed *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and over against the dominating role of church tradition, they affirmed *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone). While it is fair to say that all branches of Protestantism to a greater or lesser degree affirmed both of these principles, it was especially the Reformed tradition that insisted upon yet a third slogan, namely *tota scriptura*, insisting that a Christian must live *by the whole of Scripture* and not

just one or more of its parts. The same cannot be said for other branches of the Protestant Reformation.²

In Anabaptist Protestantism (represented, for example, by the Mennonite tradition) the Old Testament gets set aside and the New Testament, especially the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, is elevated to a position of being the “real” Bible. This has led to the distinctively “pacifist” character of Anabaptist/Mennonite Christianity. In Lutheran Christianity, the situation with respect to the Old Testament is a bit different but the consequence is similar. Martin Luther’s great discovery was the principle of justification by grace through faith alone. Justification of the sinner by God’s grace was for Luther the heart of the Christian faith. Luther was thus very suspicious of any attempt to introduce law into Christian theology. Luther’s earlier preoccupation with trying to find peace with God through works and his relief in discovering the gospel message of grace led him to downgrade the continuing significance of the Old Testament and its law. Gospel overcomes law; it is victorious over law. The result of this is that Lutherans view the Old Testament predominantly in a negative light. As law it induces guilt and prepares the way for the gospel but it has little *positive* value as continuing revelation for the Christian. Here again, the New Testament, read now through the special glasses of the gospel doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, is the “real” Bible.

Much liberal Christianity also devalues the Old Testament. Many liberal theologians, influenced by an evolutionary view of the progress of human thought, see the God of love revealed in the New Testament, especially in Jesus Christ, as a higher stage in the evolution of human consciousness than the Old Testament God of law and wrath. The great nineteenth-century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, who can be considered the father of modern theology, even suggested that the order of the Old and New Testaments ought to be reversed. The present order suggests, ac-

According to Schleiermacher, that we must first work through the whole Old Testament before we can approach the New, while in fact the Old Testament is best seen as an appendix to the New. The Christianity which is born out of the New Testament, in Schleiermacher's judgment, stands in exactly the same relationship to the Judaism of the Old Testament as it does to any heathen religion. The great nineteenth-century liberal church historian, Adolf von Harnack put it this way:

To reject the Old Testament in the second century was an error the church rightly resisted; to maintain it in the sixteenth century was a destiny the Reformation could not escape; but still to preserve it in the nineteenth century as one of the canonical documents of Protestantism is the result of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.³

The position of Calvin and Reformed thinkers after him is significantly different. While Calvin acknowledges the advantage the New Testament believers possess in comparison with Old Testament believers, he nevertheless insists that the covenant God makes with New Testament believers is the same as the covenant made with the patriarchs. There is but one covenant rooted in God's grace which has as its goal the hope of eternal life. While what Calvin calls the "mode of dispensation" differs in the two Testaments so that the Old Testament presents in a childish, veiled, shadowy, external, and earthly form what the New Testament presents in mature, clear, internal and heavenly form, there is but *one* covenant of grace. In revealing Himself to man, God accommodates Himself to our level of weakness and understanding as a parent does to a child and in various ages deals with His people in various ways. God and His word, however, do not change and His covenant remains the same.

The implication of Calvin's view is that the Old Testament remains God's normative revelation for the New Testament Christian church. The New Testament

by itself is incomplete. Whenever Christians concentrate exclusively on the New Testament, their understanding of what it means to be a child of God will necessarily be distorted. To give but one example, the New Testament nowhere explicitly repeats the so-called "cultural mandate" (better "cultural blessing") of Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" The only universal mandate found in the New Testament is the missionary mandate of Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." If one read only the New Testament, one *could* (although it would strain the New Testament itself) conclude that the only valid *Christian* activity in the world is to save souls or, putting it less perjoratively, to call men to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Cultural activity, having dominion over the earth and all work, including farming, business, social and political activity, might be necessary evils to support one's family in an industrial, money-oriented world, but are not part of our specifically Christian kingdom activity. Jesus Christ did not begin a social and political revolution. He came simply to die for man's sin. By and large, the greater majority of evangelical Christians has adopted this view and, in large measure, this is a result of an almost exclusive preoccupation with the New Testament.

The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, has been noted (and often faulted) for its preoccupation with the Old Testament. It is in the worship services of the Reformed Churches and only in the Reformed Churches that the Old Testament decalogue is still regularly read as revealing to the *Christian* God's rule for grateful and obedient living. This would be un-

thinkable in a Lutheran worship service! (Consequently, that is why “cheap grace,” accepting justification without sanctification, is the perennial threat to Lutheran Christianity while legalism and moralism are the distinct threats to Calvinism.) It is in the Reformed Calvinist Geneva, not to mention Calvinistic/Presbyterian Puritan England and later America, that attempts were made to create a theocratic society, a society in which God and His law were acknowledged by the citizenry in its public as well as private life. The model for such a society is of course not the New Testament church but theocratic Old Testament Israel. Whenever the Reformed vision captured the hearts of people, the idea of a new Israel, a new people of God destined to be a light to the nations by being a model society governed by God’s word, often also captured the imagination. This was true of Calvin’s Geneva, seventeenth and nineteenth-century Dutch Calvinism, English Puritanism, the American Pilgrim fathers, and, as James Michener so convincingly narrated in his novel *The Covenant*, the Calvinist founders of the present Republic of South Africa. Christians are not only to save men from sin; they see themselves as obligated to build the kingdom of God on earth.⁴

God’s word, given in Scripture, is in the Reformed tradition not to be limited to its redemptive message. Jesus Christ came to save men from sin and the Bible is a message to sinful man about a gracious God who seeks to find and to save the lost. But Scripture reveals to us not only a God who is Redeemer and Savior but also, and in the first place, a God who is the Creator. Scripture is not *only* about salvation from sin but it is also a word about the creation, the world in which saved man must live to the glory of God. Scripture speaks to all of life.

There are numerous ways in which Christians have sought to evade this by reducing the Bible’s message to salvation or redemption. We are told, for example, that the Bible is infallible in matters of faith or morals but

fallible or at least irrelevant in matters of science, history, education, and politics. The assumption is that we need God's revelation for our soul (and life in the church), but that when it comes to our bodies (and life in the world) we need only our natural reason. The Reformed tradition from Calvin on has always insisted that our knowledge of the natural order (the world) is corrupted by sin and that man needs the "spectacles" of Scripture in order to be able to understand the world.

The Blessing of Life in Creation Revealed in Scripture

The creation is itself a magnificent theatre displaying God's goodness, wisdom and power. However, the evidence of God's works in His creation, which renders men without excuse, is in vain because of the dullness of man's soul. God cannot be known aright by His works in creation alone. Calvin states this as clearly as anyone has:

That brightness which is borne in upon the eyes of all men both in heaven and on earth is more than enough to withdraw all support from men's ingratitude—just as God, to involve the human race in the same guilt, sets forth to all without exception His presence portrayed in His creatures. Despite this, it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that He added the light of His Word by which to become known unto salvation . . . Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.⁵

It is significant that this passage does not occur in the section of the *Institutes* where Calvin deals with salvation (Book II) but in Book I which deals with the knowledge of God the Creator. This underscores the Reformed conviction that also in order to understand the *world* as a creation of God we need the revelation of Scripture.

If we take the principle of *tota scriptura* seriously we must also take the scriptural *order* seriously. In recent years, many Christian thinkers who are partial to the emphases of so-called liberation theology begin their thinking about Scripture with the Exodus. It is the Exodus, so they say, and God's deliverance of an oppressed people that are the heart of Scripture's message. Identification with the poor and oppressed is *the* key to Christian life in the world today. Quite apart from the issue of whether liberation theologies do justice to the Exodus event (God, after all was not just delivering *any* oppressed people from their bondage but His covenant people in order that they might serve Him), beginning with the Exodus contradicts the scriptural order itself. The Bible begins with Genesis and creation and not with Exodus or redemption. The Bible concludes with a marvelous description of a new *creation*, including a new heaven and a new earth. Redemption is thus in the service of creation; it is the restoration of creation. As the biblical story unfolds, we are pointed not only to God's acts, but also to man's response to God and His acts. That covenantal relationship, in which God blesses and judges man's obedience and disobedience, illumines for us our proper role in the world as well as God's redemptive saving activity. The scriptural order thus is creation, fall (and subsequent curse), redemption (and restored blessing) and consummation (which entails a final definitive judgment as well as final definitive blessing).

What does this priority of creation to redemption mean concretely and practically in the realm of human cultural activity? Reference has been made to the so-

called cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 (“Be fruitful and multiply . . . have dominion . . .”). It should not escape notice that this is not simply a command but a blessing—“And God *blessed* them and said . . .” This underscores a theme that runs through the entire Old Testament and is based upon the fundamental belief that Yahweh, Israel’s Redeemer and Savior, is also the Creator of the world. Life in creation is to be received as a gift of the Lord under His blessing. The Old Testament knows nothing of the ascetic mistrust of the world so characteristic of many Christians who are exclusively New Testament people. There is no distrust of marriage and family life but a celebration of it. It is a “blessing” to be fruitful and multiply—“happy is the man who has his quiver full” (Psalms 127:4, 5). There is no suspicion of possessions either (although the prophetic critique against *ill-gotten* possessions must not be forgotten) but Abraham’s abundant possessions are seen to be a “blessing” of Yahweh. Israel is delivered from Egypt and promised a land flowing with milk and honey. During the Solomonic era we are told that Israel “dwelt in safety . . . every man under his vine and under his fig tree” and that “Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea; and ate and drank and were happy” (I Kings 4:20, 25). The age of Shalom was a blessing of the Lord. “The Lord my God,” noted Solomon, “has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune” (I Kings 5:4). And, although quoting the Preacher can be “risky,” what more eloquent statement of the awareness of God’s blessing can one find than in this statement from Ecclesiastes:

Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil—this is the gift of God (Ecclesiastes 5:18, 19).

Finally, what more eloquent affirmation of human sexuality as God's gift can one find than the Old Testament Song of Solomon. The Old Testament attitude is not one of suspicion and mistrust of the natural, creaturely human condition but one of whole-hearted affirmation.

This attitude of affirmation also applies to those areas in which man shapes and fashions his social and political life. The creation of Genesis 1:28 does not only refer to such "natural" dimensions as having children ("be fruitful and multiply") but to "subduing" and "having dominion." There is no suspicion here of the legitimate exercise of "power." It is in this exercise of power that man is "like God," created in His image. In the words of the psalmist reflecting in awe upon the vastness of God's creation:

When I look at Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which Thou hast established;
what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou dost care for him?
Yet Thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea
(Psalm 8:3-8).

Man's proper dominion over the earth is also under God's blessing, and man is called to understand God's world and work in it. It is not accidental that Solomon, whose reign represents the golden age of Israel, was also Israel's wisest king whose wisdom surpassed all others and gained for him an international reputation. His wisdom not only included judicious civil matters (the two women claiming the one remaining live child) but also what we would today call science. Solomon, we are

told “spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hysop that grows out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish” (I Kings 4:33). The knowledge of agricultural practice is also praised by Isaiah (28:23-29) who notes that such knowledge “also comes from the Lord of Hosts; He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom” (vs. 29). Wisdom as Yahweh’s gift is also important for political life, as the story of Absalom and the conflicting counsel of his two wise men, Ahithophel and Hushai, makes clear.

Calvinism and Capitalism

At this point a few words need to be said about the oft-repeated accusation that Calvinism is the spiritual parent of capitalism. This claim, which was first made by the German sociologist Max Weber in his famous study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,⁶ published in 1904-05, and later repeated by the British thinker R.H. Tawney in his 1922 study *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*,⁷ undoubtedly contains a germ of truth. In many respects it is difficult to assess the Weber-Tawney thesis⁸ adequately because definitions of capitalism are so frustratingly elusive and the word “capitalism” today carries with it an immense ideological and emotional baggage. Without going into unnecessary detail, we can say that at least affirmations made especially by the Calvinist tradition can provide the basis for the vigorous market economy that is indispensable to the spirit of capitalism. The first is the idea that it is man’s task to have dominion over the earth as a vocation or calling before the Lord, and the second is the related basic attitude of trust and affirmation of the creation which makes such dominion possible. Both arise, of course, from the strong affirmation of creation previously discussed in this chapter.

For Calvin and the Reformed tradition after him it was important to distinguish between human, creaturely

activity as such and the corruption of that activity by sin. In principle all human activity was seen to be legitimate as a calling before God. Herman Bavinck says this about Calvin's views:

Nothing is unclean in itself; every part of the world and every calling in life is a revelation of the divine perfections, so that even the humblest day-laborer fulfills a divine calling. This is the democratic element in the doctrine of Calvin: there is with God no acceptance of persons; all men are equal before Him; even the humblest and meanest workman, if he be a believer, fills a place in the Kingdom of God and stands as a co-laborer with God in His presence.⁹

When this idea of calling is combined with a basic attitude of trust to the world and applied to the world of economy and business, one can see that a religious motivation for a vigorous market economy is born. Medieval Roman Catholicism condemned all use of capital for interest and gain as usury. Calvin made an important distinction between lending money to people who were in need and lending money in order to increase productivity. The rich (who have capital) must not charge interest when lending to the needy poor nor neglect charity in order to have money available for lending purposes.¹⁰ In a comment on Leviticus 25:35-38 (“and if your brother becomes poor, and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the Lord your God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God”), Calvin acknowledges that God had good reason for condemning usury: “We see that the end for which the law was framed was, that men should not cruelly oppress the poor, who ought rather to

receive sympathy and compassion . . . This was, indeed, a part of the judicial law which God appointed for the Jews in particular; but it is a common principle of justice which extends to all nations and to all ages, we should keep ourselves from plundering and devouring the poor who are in distress and want."¹¹ However, this is but one side of the usury issue. Calvin immediately goes on to qualify the *general* prohibition against lending money which had been so characteristic of medieval Roman Catholic ethical reflection.

. . . Whence it follows, that the gain which he who lends his money upon interest acquires, without doing injury to any one, is not to be included under the head of unlawful usury. The Hebrew word *neshek* which David employs, being derived from another word, which signifies *to bite*, sufficiently shows that usuries are condemned in so far as they involve in them or lead to a license of robbing and plundering our fellow-men. Ezekiel, indeed, chapters xviii. 17, and xxii. 12, seems to condemn the taking of any interest whatever upon money lent; but he doubtless has an eye to the unjust and crafty arts of gaining, by which the rich devoured the poor people. In short, provided we had engraven on our hearts the rule of equity, which Christ prescribes in Matthew vii. 12, "therefore, all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," it would not be necessary to enter into lengthened disputes concerning usury.¹²

This perspective of Calvin and his spiritual heirs, that lending money for productive purposes which does not injure the poor is not to be prohibited, served to remove the longstanding medieval opposition and barriers against the development of a capitalist market economy. More positively, the affirmation of the world of finance and business as a legitimate calling and the attendant attitude of trust in the creation also spurred on the growth of the capitalist market economy. Michael

Novak sums up the crucial role of trust which is implicit in what he refers to as the democratic capitalist view of the world:

Anthropologically, the European adventure in modernity was made possible because miners trusted the dark innards of the earth, alchemists were not fundamentally afraid of the elements of nature, inventors did not hesitate to bring forth novelties, investors parted with tangibles in the intangible hope of future returns. They did so despite the romantic, even reactionary, tradition which taught humans to fear nature and to see modernity as Frankenstein. Humankind could give rein to a generous instinct, trusting that God's nature would offer reward in kind. Up and outward went the thrust of democratic capitalism. First came investment and effort, later the return. The spirit was not that of the zero-sum nor that of the miser nor that of primitive fear, but that of the experimenting follower of dreams.¹³

My purpose for including these brief reflections on economic matters here should not be misunderstood. It is not my intent first of all to provide a biblical apology for any particular economic system or program, including many that go under the name of "capitalism" today. The point I am making is simply this: historically, the rise of a capital-oriented free-market economy was a practical implication of the Reformed attitude to the world that I have sketched in this chapter. While it was not the sole reason or motivation for the development of a capitalist economy in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and subsequent centuries, the Calvinist vision did provide a certain justification and space for such an economy. Because even such a modest historical association of Reformed Christianity with capitalism is anathema to some Christians (and will be uncritically and unfairly hailed by others), I must hasten to add that this historical link in no way gives even tacit approval to many of the ills that are often alleged to be the fruit of

capitalism. Reformed Christianity does not approve of materialism, consumerism or the wanton pollution of earth's land, water and air. Reformed Christianity does not approve of class conflict between management and labor nor does it condone exploitation of workers purely for the profit of entrepreneurs and shareholders. Reformed Christianity does not approve of structural unemployment as a government policy to keep inflation down. For Calvin, it must be remembered, all of life including economic life was a calling and all calling comes from and stands under the Word of God which includes words of judgment against those who exploit and oppress. "In the Scriptures," says Calvin, "'calling' is a lawful way of life, for it is connected with God, who actually calls us. That is pointed out to prevent anyone from misinterpreting this verse (I Cor. 7:20) to give support to ways of life which are clearly worldly and sinful."¹⁴ In this regard Calvin's comments on care for the poor as well as principles of stewardship and care for the creation must not be overlooked. Dominion over the earth, also in the market-place, must be done as a calling before God and in obedience to His law. Social-cultural obedience, also in the economic realm, must be informed and guided by Scriptural revelation.

Christian Education

Although economic activity was used here as an example to illustrate the Reformed attitude to the world, the development of scientific thought or even political life in the post-Reformation era could as easily have been chosen. In both of these areas calling and trust in the creation also promoted an unfolding of human culture.¹⁵ It is this basic attitude of trust with respect to human, creaturely tasks combined with the conviction that all creaturely life is under the Lord's blessing such that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom" that has led to a distinctively Reformed perspective on Christian education. Reformed Christian

education is necessary because the “natural” man does not understand that his life in the world cannot be blessed apart from the guidance of God’s revelation. Reformed Christian education does not separate students from the world for the sake of separation but in order to prepare them for obedient, holy discipleship in the world. Reformed Christian schools are thus not church schools nor do they have evangelism as their primary focus. Wisdom, insight into living obediently and thus enjoying God’s blessing—that is the goal.

In this connection a word needs to be said about what makes Christian schools “Christian.” Although more will be said about Christian education in the fourth and especially the sixth chapters, at this point it should be noted that Christian day schools at elementary, secondary, college and/or university levels are not “Christian” simply because they are populated by Christian teachers and students. Nor are they Christian because Jesus is frequently spoken about or even prayed to. Christian schools are Christian because parents, teachers, and boards are committed to curricula designed to teaching students that all things are created by the Father through the *wisdom* or *Word* who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is not in the first place the *gospel* of salvation but the *wisdom* of God in creation that is the special concern of the school. For this reason, while the Bible is indispensable in a Christian school, it cannot and must not be the only textbook. In fact, properly speaking, the Bible is not a textbook of science or history. The farmer who wishes to grow crops must be wise in the ways of creation, and Scripture study is not the only or even chief means to do that. This does not mean that the Bible is irrelevant for farmers. There are laws, notably in the Book of Leviticus, that gave explicit instructions to the people of Israel concerning proper stewardship of land and resources. The principles given there, while they are to be applied in different ways in today’s more mechanized and industrialized agricultural situation, ought not to be ignored by the Christian

farmer. The word of God in Scripture does contain norms that farmers may ignore and disregard at their peril. Furthermore, what is true for the farmer is no less true for the businessman or politician. The injunction given by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, ("Give to him who begs of you") is not irrelevant for a Christian banker. Banks and bankers, too, have community and personal obligations which cannot simply be translated into balance sheets, dividends and profits. Nevertheless, the words of our Lord surely cannot be taken to be *the* sole guiding principle for financial institutions, and Christian education institutions have a common-sense and even moral obligation to train Christian young men and women in matters of accounting, finance, and business management. Similarly, "turn the other cheek," again while not irrelevant for statesmen (think of Pope John Paul II's gesture of forgiveness to his would-be assassin), cannot be the only relevant counsel of Scripture or of human experience for political life.

It is especially the Reformed tradition which has recognized this and has resisted the attempt to draw norms for daily living exclusively from the gospel. In Calvin's day there were those who insisted that because Jesus Christ had freed them from sin, they were no longer subject to any human law. To be free from the law of sin in Christ meant to be radically and totally free from all law. Calvin rightly repudiates such an idea and makes a distinction between two kingdoms, one "political" and the other "spiritual," and then notes: "Through this distinction it comes about that we are not to misapply to the political order the gospel teaching on spiritual freedom, as if Christians were less subject as concerns outward government to human law; as if they were released from all bodily servitude because they are free according to the spirit."¹⁶ Two areas where this misapplication continues to take place among Christians today is in Christian pacifism and in Christian feminism where the Sermon on the Mount and the gospel truth of

Galatians 3:28 (“In Christ there is neither male nor female”) are used to justify radical non-violence and equalitarianism respectively.

Common Grace and Worldliness

It is clear that the Bible, while indispensable, cannot serve as the only “textbook” in Christian schools. Another thorny problem for Christian education in particular is the question of whether Christians can learn from unbelievers. Is there any wisdom to be found in the “world”? The Reformed tradition, the Rev. Herman Hoeksema¹⁷ notwithstanding, has always answered that question with a cautious affirmative. The term “common grace,” as its critics have eloquently argued, is indeed poorly chosen. The term “grace” should be limited to the sphere of redemption. A word of caution also needs to be raised in the Reformed community because some of the proponents of common grace on occasion tend simply to “baptize” all secular culture. The doctrine of common grace must not be used to obscure and obliterate the antithesis between the people of God and the “world” also in their respective cultural activity. But that God is faithful to the creation and that the creation’s patterns of regularity combined with God’s blessing and curse upon man’s efforts *compel* even unbelieving men and women to live “wisely” cannot be disputed. While life on earth is not yet heaven, it most certainly is not hell either. We live daily with an incredible amount of communal and personal trust. We are understandably shocked, for example, when consumer products such as food or drugs are tampered with and innocent people poisoned. There is a great deal of mutual trust necessary for the maintaining of a healthy, well-functioning society. The Reformed tradition attributes the possibility of this trust to the restraining activity of God upon man’s sinful inclination.

The last point brings up one more very important thing that should be said about life in creation and

culture. With the exception of the immediately preceding and brief discussion of common grace and God's restraining activity, any mention of the fall into sin has thus far been (deliberately!) avoided. While a creation theology is the place to *begin* reflection on Christian life in the world, we cannot stop there; we do live in a sinful world. In a sinful world the positive affirmation of God's creation and world can lead to what the Scriptures call worldliness. It is one thing to speak positively about the creation and to remove the suspicion that hangs over natural creaturely life and the legitimate exercise of power and dominion. It is another, however, to be naive about the evil consequences of sin in the creation and the limits that must be placed upon such power in the hands of sinful men. Calvinists who eloquently defend the former have not always been sensitive to the temptations of the latter. It is no accident that Solomon's golden age also produced the "worldly" idolatry that led to the Lord's judgment on the Solomonic kingdom. It is also noteworthy that the golden age of Dutch life in the seventeenth century also led to a pietist reaction to worldly Christianity. Closer to home for Christian Reformed people, it is no accident that after Abraham Kuyper's great success at the turn of the century, the *Gereformeerde Kerken*¹⁸ in the Netherlands in 1920 felt compelled to issue a warning about worldliness in the church. The Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder's¹⁹ protests against the worldliness of the Dutch Reformed community in the 1930's must be seen in the same light. And it is also interesting to note that four years after the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted the famous "three points of common grace," it too felt compelled to balance the scales by passing on a stern warning to the churches about "worldly amusements."

The limits of creation theology, the temptation of using the doctrine of common grace as a rationale for uncritically embracing all secular un-Christian culture, must not be forgotten. But that, by way of introduction,

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is a topic which will be considered more thoroughly in the next two chapters.

Notes

1. *Institutes*, I.xiii.18.
2. For much of what follows I have been stimulated by Henry Vander Goot's essay "Tota Scriptura" in *Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1981), pp. 97-117.
3. Cited by A.A. van Ruler, in *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 10.
4. For a fascinating study of how this Calvinistic emphasis has shaped American Christianity, see H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937).
5. *Institutes*, I.vi.1.
6. English edition translated by Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
7. London: Penguin Books, 1938.
8. The best review of the Weber-Tawney thesis that I know of is H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change," in *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), pp. 1-45.
9. "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Princeton Theological Review*, VII (1909), p. 464.
10. For a full discussion of Calvin's views on usury see W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and his Socio-Economic Impact* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1971), pp. 87-96.
11. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, translated by James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 213. The passage Calvin is dealing with here is Psalm 15:5 ("who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent").
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.
13. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), pp. 98-99.
14. *Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, translated by John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).
15. See, for example, Eugene M. Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).
16. *Institutes*, III.xix.15.
17. Rev. Herman Hoeksema was a Christian Reformed pastor who vigorously disputed the doctrine of common grace. The 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church reaffirmed the doctrine and Rev. Hoeksema, upon his refusal to acquiesce, was suspended from the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church and founded the Protestant Reformed Church.
18. The equivalent of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands.
19. Klaas Schilder (1890-1952) was a minister-theologian in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands well known among other things for his warnings against worldly Christianity.

4.

God the Son, Redemption and Discipleship

The Reformed Christian tradition is, I have been suggesting, characteristically trinitarian in its theology and catholic in its vision. Within that trinitarian, catholic framework, Reformed theology *begins* with God the Father and creation rather than God the Son and redemption. The most fundamental question according to this Reformed perspective is not “Why did God become man?” (*cur deus homo*), but “Why did God create man?” (*cur creatio*). If God became man to save him from sin, He created man in order that man might glorify his Maker.

The result of this pre-eminence given to God the Father and creation is that for the Christian a life lived in God’s world, in the creation, is seen to be under the blessing of God. When God created man, male and female, He *blessed* them and gave them a position of responsibility and rulership in the creation. The Reformed tradition has therefore always insisted that the *legitimate* exercise of power (dominion) in business, politics or church life is not to be rejected in principle but to be affirmed. Furthermore, the good creation of God, and man’s dominion in it, is to be accepted and en-

joyed as a gift of God. Having and raising a family, starting and operating a successful business, running for and obtaining political office are all proper and valid Christian *vocations* in which one can and is called to glorify God. The Reformed tradition does not consider the gospel ministry the only holy and lawful or even the most noble calling before God. In fact, it is interesting to note what Calvin says about civil or political authority: "Accordingly, no one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal man."¹ Imagine that—according to Calvin politicians as well if not more than gospel ministers are true "kingdom workers"!

The Reformed emphasis upon the creation thus leads to the conviction that the material blessings of God's world are not to be despised but accepted and enjoyed as His gifts. Food and drink, a decent home, clothing, an automobile, and even the fruits of human culture (art, music, theatre, sports) are not to be despised but used aright. Abraham Kuyper sums up this Reformed attitude thus: "If you are rich toward God, it will not harm you to be also rich in this world's goods. For then you will know yourself as steward of the Almighty, and the money will serve you, and through you, serve God."² In the Christian tradition there have been those who suggest that in our earthly pilgrimage we are permitted to use those things that are absolutely necessary such as basic food, drink, clothing and shelter. Beyond that, however, all is forbidden excess and luxury. Calvin notes his appreciation for this concern about worldly indulgence of the flesh but insists that such counsel is too severe: "For they would fetter consciences more tightly than does the Word of the Lord—a very dangerous thing. Now, to them necessity means to abstain from all things that they could do without, thus, according to them, it would scarcely be permitted to add any food at all to plain bread and

water.”³ Over against this position Calvin insists that the Christian’s conscience must be free to use God’s earthly gifts for *delight* as well as *necessity*. “Let this then be our principle: that the use of God’s gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author Himself created and destined them for us, since He created them for our good, not for our ruin.”⁴ A pipe organ in church, piano lessons for one’s children, an original painting on the wall, an attractive as well as a functional home or dinner setting, an occasional steak or glass of wine are to be a matter of free conscience for a Christian. “All things,” to combine two statements from the apostle Paul, “All things are lawful since everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer” (I Corinthians 6:12 and I Timothy 4:4).

The Problem of Sin and the Work of Christ

All things are lawful, but—and here is the rub—Paul then adds “but not all things are helpful.” The last chapter on living in the creation of the Father concluded with an acknowledgment that it was a deliberately one-sided presentation because it omitted any discussion of how the fall into sin affected man’s life in creation. Precisely how the fact of sin and the need for the redeeming, saving work of the Son now affects our understanding of that life in creation is the special focus of this chapter.

The proper work of the Son as it is outlined in the Apostles’ Creed is the work of salvation from sin. The events listed in the Creed, virgin birth, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and session, are all related to the specifically *saving* activity of the Son of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ. It should not escape our attention, however, that while our confession concerning the Son focuses on His redemptive work for us, it is not redemption but creation that is the

first word about the second person of the Trinity. Before the Word of God became flesh and lived among us to save us, that same Word created the heavens and the earth. Before the Son of God became Jesus of Nazareth, He was with God in eternity. “In the beginning,” writes the Apostle John, “was the Word, and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1). The Apostle Paul ties together the work of Christ in creation and redemption in these magnificent words from Colossians 1:15-20:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

Note well that Christ was mediator of creation (“for in Him all things were created”) *before* becoming man and mediator of redemption (“to reconcile to Himself all things”). The significance of this for our understanding of the church’s task in the world will be considered later in this chapter. Here it serves as one more reminder that the priority of creation in Reformed thought is rooted in the testimony of Scripture even as it testifies to Jesus Christ the Savior.

It is interesting (but of course also speculative) to consider what might have happened if man had not sinned. Would the incarnation have taken place? Would God have become man in order to be “Immanuel—God with us?”⁵ We do not know; Scripture tells us that Jesus

Christ came into the world to save sinners (see I Timothy 1:15). What we do know is that we are no longer living in the Garden of Eden but in a fallen, sinful world. This reality must affect the way we live as Christians in the world. Specifically it qualifies and limits our enjoyment of creation for several reasons. First of all, sin distorts our legitimate enjoyment of creation so that proper enjoyment often becomes intemperance and indulgence. Sinful people in God's good creation are often like small unsupervised children set loose in a candy store—they lose control of themselves. Secondly, while the exercise of power is commanded by God (“have dominion”) and therefore legitimate, we know all too well the reality of the exploitation and abuse of power in our world. Authoritarianism and totalitarianism often rear their ugly heads in family, church, business and state. Thirdly, one of sin's consequences is that the distribution of God's good gifts given in creation is inequitous. Some have far more than they need while others lack even the basic necessities. Our love for our neighbor who is in need demands of us a willingness to sacrifice even that which in itself is legitimate and good. Consequently the sinful state of this present life should lead us to what Calvin called a certain “contempt” of this present life and a corresponding longing for the life to come. This present life (under sin) is characterized by a certain “vanity.” In a sinful world we are indeed “pilgrims” whose citizenship is in heaven and not on earth. “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,” says Paul. “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3).

What Paul is saying here (and this is hardly an isolated statement in the New Testament) is that for the child of God who lives, as we do, in the New Testament age, between the ascension and the second coming, Jesus Christ must be the one who shapes and directs our lives. We are to be followers, disciples, imitators of

Jesus Christ. A Christian is one who shares, participates in the redemptive, reconciling work of Jesus Christ and then, as His follower, seeks to be an ambassador of reconciliation. As new creatures in Christ we are called to proclaim in word and deed the gospel which frees and renews men. In the words of the Apostle Paul:

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:17-20).

Jesus Christ the Son of God, true God and true man, is thus the Redeemer who gave His life as a ransom for the sin of man. It is one of the characteristic traits of Reformed (in contrast with so-called Arminian) theology that it stresses man's total inability to contribute to his own salvation and his utter dependence on God's grace. *Soli deo gloria*, to God alone be the glory. Calvin eloquently states it this way:

At the time when man was distinguished with the noblest marks of honor through God's beneficence, not even then was he permitted to boast about himself. How much more ought he now to humble himself, cast himself down as he has been—due to his own ungratefulness—from the loftiest glory into extreme disgrace! At the time, I say, when he had been advanced to the highest degree of honor, Scriptures attributed nothing else to him than that he had been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), thus suggesting that man was blessed, not because of his own good actions, but by participation in God.

What, therefore, now remains for man, bare and destitute of all glory, but to recognize God for whose beneficence he could not be grateful when he abounded with the riches of His grace; and at least, by confessing his own poverty, to glorify Him in whom he did not previously glory in recognition of his own blessings.⁶

Man's need for a redeemer stems from his inescapable and total spiritual blindness. He is a willing slave to sin, sinning by necessity though not by compulsion.⁷ Calvin acknowledges that not all of man's natural creaturely endowments are destroyed by sin although they are corrupted. However, even knowing God truly as creator, as Almighty, is impossible apart from revelation in Jesus Christ. "For even if God wills to manifest His fatherly favor to us in many ways," says Calvin, "yet we cannot by contemplating the universe infer that He is Father."⁸ We need, in short, a mediator who can not only reveal the Father to us but who can redeem us, who can reconcile us with the Father.

The simple message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is that redeemer/reconciler. Through His obedient life, culminating in His willing death on the cross, He atoned for man's sin and freed us from death's curse. Through His resurrection He became victorious over sin and death. We share in Christ's death by dying unto our old sinful self, and we share in His resurrection by partaking in that new life. Jesus Christ the Redeemer also ascended into heaven and rules at God's right hand until He comes to judge the living and the dead. In His ascension Jesus Christ prepares the way for us, intercedes for us and rules His church until He delivers the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

The Church's Missionary Calling

It is the simple responsibility of the church to proclaim this gospel message. The missionary mandate given to the church by her ascending Lord is: "All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). The reason for this mandate is that even though Jesus Christ’s redemptive work is complete and perfect, its effects on the world are yet incomplete. Not all men believe, and even those who believe are not yet fully sanctified. We hear an urgency to evangelize the world, to call men to a saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. It can be said that for us as New Testament Christians, evangelization must be a priority. Evangelism is not, however, the only necessary and valid activity of the Christian community. The authority which Jesus speaks of in Matthew 28 (“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”) is in one sense unlimited (“All authority”), but in another sense it is also limited. In commenting on I Corinthians 15:24 and 28, (“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power . . . When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be everything to every one”), Calvin notes: “(Paul) means . . . that in that perfect glory the administration of the kingdom will not be as it now is. The Father has given all power to the Son that He may by the Son’s hand govern, nourish and sustain us, keep us in His care, and help us. Thus while for the short time we wander away from God, Christ stands in our midst, to lead us little by little to a firm union with God.”⁹ When we speak of the authority of Christ the Redeemer, we must realize that this specific, *redemptive* authority is temporary. Redemption is, if you will, an emergency measure necessitated by sin. The authority of Christ, the Redeemer, which stands behind the missionary task of the church is limited to the power given to the church to evangelize.

It will be clear from this that the position advocated here differs from that of some Reformed thinkers who regard the “whatsoever I have commanded you” of Matthew 28:20 to include explicitly all of scriptural revelation including the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28. That would make a neat Reformed point, but it is without exegetical warrant. Furthermore, as will be indicated later in this chapter, it is crucial to distinguish (but not separate!) the two mandates and not subsume the one under the other.

Following the Ascended Christ in Suffering Love

Another way of stating this is to note that Jesus Christ is the king of two distinct kingdoms. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate this is to see what Lord’s Day 18 of the Heidelberg Catechism says about the ascension of Jesus Christ. In question and answer 46 the Catechism notes that the ascension means simply that Jesus Christ left the earth and is now in heaven. This of course raises the question: “But isn’t Christ with us until the end of the world as He promised us?” The Catechism answers: “Christ is true man and true God. In His human nature Christ is not now on earth; but in His divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit He is not absent from us for a moment.” This raises a further question: “If His humanity is not present wherever His divinity is, then aren’t the two natures of Christ separated from each other?” The Catechism responds to this as follows: “Certainly not. Since the divinity is not limited and is present everywhere, it is evident that Christ’s divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity He has taken on, but at the same time His divinity is in and remains personally united to His humanity.” Note what the Catechism is doing here (and, incidentally, it reflects here a typically Reformed view in contrast to the Lutheran view of the ascension which contends that after the ascension the human nature becomes like the divine and acquires all the characteristics of the divine

nature such as omnipresence, and omniscience). The Catechism is making a *distinction* (not a separation!) between the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity and the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but the second person of the Trinity is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth. To confine the Word of God to the earthly body of Jesus Christ is mere impudence, in Calvin's judgment. He puts it this way: "For even if the Word in His immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that He was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, He willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet He continuously filled the world even as He had done from the beginning!"¹⁰

The point, following Calvin's insight, being made here is simply this: while our service to God is total and complete, embracing all of our life, we must realize that following Jesus the Redeemer has its limits, limits which arise out of the unnatural and temporary situation of human sin. As *Redeemer*, Jesus is *not* the model for all of life. His cultural, social and political activity does not serve as the exclusive paradigm for ours. Nevertheless, following Jesus, the imitation of Christ, is an absolute necessity in this world where sin remains. There is still opposition to God's kingdom; the last enemy must still be destroyed. Jesus Christ the Redeemer, the Reconciler who gives His church the authority and mandate to be ambassadors of reconciliation, also asks His disciples to follow His example in that work. In a sinful world we are to be imitators of Christ.

What does this rather involved theological discussion mean in concrete terms? Simply and basically it means that even as our Lord became a suffering servant, not counting His equality with God something to hold on to, but emptying and humbling Himself in obedience even unto the death on the cross, so we too must adopt

the servant posture, as Paul so beautifully states in Philippians 2:1-8:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Christian discipleship, following Jesus, means a life of self-giving love which, in a broken world, will involve self-denial and cross-bearing. The servant is not greater than his master and anyone who wants to follow Christ must also take up his own cross and deny himself. The imitation of Christ is thus a necessary ingredient in a Christian life, necessary because suffering love is the only way to overcome sin and its consequences.

There are however, limits to this imitation of Christ as the model for our Christian life and experience. The imitation of Christ (self-denial, cross-bearing) has a particularly *redemptive* focus and purpose in a sinful world. But redemption, the forgiveness and removal of sin in a certain sense, is also limited. We must concern ourselves not only with redemption in that narrow sense but also with the question of how *positively* to live in God's world. We must learn the *rules*, or laws of creation. There is much more to marriage than self-denial and suffering, and while marriage partners are often called to suffer long, there are limits.¹¹ There are times when love requires that we demand rights, the rights of our

neighbor for justice or bread, the right to fulfill our calling before God, the right to be wife or husband, child or parent. Suffering love does not mean *passive* acceptance of abuse.

The Tension Between Heaven and Earth

Because we live in a sinful world, we experience a real tension between a perspective rooted in creation which seeks positively to live by the rules and blessings of creation and a perspective rooted in redemption which stresses suffering *love*. There is in this dispensation no simple solution to that dilemma, but Calvin's guideline of moderation (and thus *limits*) in all things, moderation or simplicity in living creationally as well as moderation in living redemptively (acknowledging the limits of suffering love) is very helpful. Our life in the creation is moderated or limited by the reality of sin—we cannot gorge ourselves on the creation lest we become worldly. Our life as suffering, cross-bearing imitators of Christ is moderated or limited by the necessity and legitimacy of life in the creation which is also God's. That this tension is indeed one suggested by Scripture itself is apparent from a consideration of the Apostle Paul's well-known words in Colossians 3:1-4:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

At first glance this passage seems to be "otherworldly" and thus, if one dare suggest this, unreformed. At least the attention of Paul's readers is directed not to earth or to the creation where life is to be lived to the glory of God, but up, away from the earth to heaven. Heaven, and citizenship there, is the focal point of the Christian experience. Does this passage not suggest that monks

and mystics along with the numerous otherworldly, ascetic sects that have arisen in the history of the Christian church are closer to Paul's vision here than creation affirming Calvinists?

But note closely what the apostle says. The heaven to which our attention, not to mention our life, must be directed is "where Christ is." When we recall the Heidelberg Catechism's discussion of our Lord's ascension, in Lord's Day 18, summarized only a few pages earlier in this chapter, it becomes clear that heaven is the place where the *man* (human nature!) Jesus is. To seek the things that are above is to look to the true and perfect **man**; who was obedient to the Father in all aspects. To seek the things that are above is to follow Him who not only taught us to pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" but who Himself did it perfectly. To seek the things that are above is not to deny the creation and flee from the world but to affirm our full and complete *humanity* as obedient sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

That this is indeed Paul's point in the third chapter of Colossians is clear from the message of the book as a whole and from the verses that follow. Paul's letter to the Colossians was directed to those creation-denying ascetics who had corrupted the Colossians with their numerous "do not touch, do not handle, do not taste" regulations (see 2:20-23 which immediately precedes 3:1-4). Paul dismisses such asceticism as "philosophy and empty deceit" (2:8) and affirms the full reality of Christ Jesus as the mediator and Lord of creation as well as of redemption:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the first-born

from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

These verses underscore for us that redemption and a life oriented to following Jesus Christ are not to be considered in radical opposition to a life in creation but rather affirm it. Finally, it should be noted that the verses which follow in chapter 3 (vss. 5-14) clearly indicate that Paul is not attacking creational activity but the *abuse* of creational activity. Not sexuality but immorality, not desire but *evil* desire, not speech but malice, slander and foul talk are forbidden.

Yet it is important to remember that there is a tension between creation and redemption, between following Christ the Creator and Christ the Servant-Lord whose sacrificial, self-denying, cross-bearing example demands of us a certain distance with respect to the creation. Our Lord is in heaven, not on earth, and while His *human* nature is the paradigm for our *human* obedience, the fact that He is in heaven, away from us, not yet having conquered every evil rule, and power and authority, not yet having delivered up the kingdom in all its fullness to the Father (I Corinthians 15:24), means that we cannot entirely be "at home" in this world. Our citizenship is in heaven and we are truly aliens and exiles on earth (see *inter alia* I Peter 1:1; 1:17; 2:11). The alien, exile, pilgrim character of this life is not because the soul, heaven or a so-called "spiritual" realm, are more important than the body and an "earthly" realm, but because there is sin in the creation. In a world where there is immorality, exploitation, injustice, racism, war, starvation, and death, the believer whose "life is hid with Christ" (Colossians 3:3) cannot feel entirely at home and properly longs for a new heaven and a new earth. The tension between affirming and enjoying the present creation as God's gift and longing to be with

Christ is thus undeniable and real. To dismiss this tension as an unbiblical “dualism” and to try somehow fully to harmonize creation and redemption *today* is to be insensitive to the reality of the present eschatological age. We are still living between the times.

Culture and Missions

The question that we must face is this: In our present age, which has the priority, creation or redemption, or, if you will, culture or mission? If it is the case, as I suggested a few paragraphs ago, that creation and redemption both “limit” each other, where do we put the emphasis? Is it more important to stress that creation and culture limit missions and evangelism (in practical terms, that Christian day school education is more important than missions), or the reverse, that missions and evangelism qualify and limit our cultural activity? Which is the more significant mandate for us now, Genesis 1:28 or Matthew 28:18-20?

Is it fair to suggest that the Christian Reformed Church, for example (I am not prepared to say whether this be true for other Reformed communities), in its practice on the local level has made a definite choice here? Is it not the case that for most local Christian Reformed communities the cultural mandate and Christian day school education clearly have a priority? Does not educating those *within* the covenant receive more Christian Reformed time and money than bringing others into the covenant community? (In fairness this needs to be qualified by the fact that Christian Reformed people do contribute very generously to denominational mission projects such as world and home missions, world relief and the broadcast ministry of the Back to God Hour.) One often encounters in the Christian Reformed Church the rationalization that “all of life is religion” and that therefore being a Christian carpenter, plumber or housewife is as important in the kingdom of God as is evangelism. A certain degree of

scorn is often heaped by some Christian Reformed people on the "fundamentalists" who fail to view carpentry as a legitimate Christian vocation and feel the need to "witness" to Jesus Christ in their places of work. Could that be a reason why some also in the Christian Reformed Church seem more ready to embrace the social and political movements of liberal churches than the mission efforts of fellow evangelicals? Such an attitude toward evangelism and missions is wrong and even unreformed. A Christian life is indeed an important witness to the world. It calls the attention of non-Christians to the evidence of the gospel message in the believer and to its concrete implication for life. A Christian life is, however, not the same as and certainly no *substitute* for explicit word-proclamation of that gospel message, if for no other reason than that a Christian's life always falls short of the gospel ideal and is itself measured and judged by the Word. Word and deed are inseparable but they must be distinguished. The deed (a Christian life) is necessary to give flesh to the word, and the word is necessary to point beyond the imperfection of all deeds.

A word needs to be said at this point about the nature and scope of salvation, in particular the relationship between creation and redemption. It has been argued this far that the Reformed vision in its catholicity means that salvation is not seen as an elevation above or an escape from creation but rather the restoration of creation. Christ came to restore man as God's image-bearer in the creation. All legitimate tasks on earth are thus vocations, callings from and before God. Some Reformed Christians have concluded from this that in His redeeming work Christ has in principle restored the situation man was in before the fall. The *missionary* mandate of Matthew 28:18-20 ("Go into all the world . . .") is simply a repeat, a republication of the *cultural* mandate of Genesis 1:28 ("Have dominion over the earth . . ."). The practical implication of this is that the missionary command and the practice of evangelism is

subsumed under and often even disappears in the cultural mandate. To evangelize then simply means to be *culturally* obedient as a witness; explicit proclamation of the gospel message is at best secondary, at worst omitted altogether. Such a conclusion is not a legitimate development from the emphases of this and the previous chapter.

Why must the cultural and missionary commands be clearly distinguished? There are two very important reasons for this. First of all, if the missionary mandate is seen merely as a republication or repeat of the cultural mandate, the command to and need for explicit proclamation of the gospel message is greatly diminished. The Christian's "witness" in the world is reduced to being culturally or perhaps morally obedient. It is fair to say that this has been the trend in "liberal" Christianity for at least two centuries and is also the present-day tendency of ecumenical Christianity as this is reflected in the theology and practice of the World Council of Churches. If, on the other hand, the missionary mandate replaces or swallows up the cultural mandate, evangelistic activity is then logically considered to be the only valid *Christian* activity in the world. This may be said to be the error of much so-called "fundamentalist" Christianity in North America. Therefore we must conclude that Christians need to distinguish (but not separate!) and obey two distinct mandates: the cultural mandate and the missionary mandate.

We live in the New Testament age, not in the garden of Eden or in the new earth. We cannot simply say that because Jesus Christ has come He has restored all human culture so that the situation of Genesis 1:28 has returned or that of Revelation 21 has arrived. In this age our *primary* obligation is shaped by the *missionary* rather than the *cultural* mandate. The period in which we live, the last days, is the age of the Holy Spirit and the age of the church. The march of world history is not, according to the New Testament, determined by our cultural obedience, but by the preaching of the gospel:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). It should not be considered unreformed therefore when Christians who have enjoyable, satisfying jobs, truly practiced as callings before the Lord, still feel a certain degree of guilt because they are not as busy in evangelism or explicit word-proclamation as they would like to be. That is not a diminishing of a sense of cultural calling or a denial that redemption is the restoration of creation, but an honest and sensitive response to the need of the world and its cry for deliverance from sin. It must also be noted that this does not mean that all Christians have identical responsibilities to communicate the gospel message verbally in a public forum. While all Christians are called to be able to give a defense to anyone who calls them to account for the hope that is in them (I Peter 3:15), not all have the gifts required to be public evangelists. For some Christians, public lives of obedience to Christ will indeed be their greatest witness. The only point being made here is that the *community* as a whole may not reduce or subordinate to its cultural task the evangelistic task commanded us by our Lord.

It should be clear from an earlier discussion in this chapter that the church’s task is also in a certain sense limited. Its task, determined by the missionary mandate rather than the cultural mandate, is simply to proclaim in word and deed the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The calling of the Christian person, however, is not limited to the church and sharing in its task. To clarify this point, Abraham Kuyper and many Reformed thinkers after him who are sympathetic to his vision make a distinction between the church as *institute* (the organized worshipping, teaching, evangelizing church) and the church as *organism* (the Christian community at large in all its endeavors). While the terminology leaves something to be desired (it is more in keeping with scriptural givens to restrict the term “church” to what

Kuyper referred to as the church institute) the distinction is valid. The reason for the tendency today to involve the church (institute) in a broad range of social, cultural and political activities is because the broader Christian community, as *Christian community*, outside of its worship setting, has been derelict in its cultural obligations. When the *limits* of the church's task are thus underscored, this must be accompanied by a call for Christians to be busy *as Christians* in social, cultural and political activity.¹²

Finally, a brief word about Christian discipleship and Christian day school education. Properly speaking, of course, the topic of Christian day school education belongs in the previous chapter of this book which deals with creation and culture. Such education is designed to promote Christian *cultural or creational* obedience. It is not in the first place designed to evangelize students or to prepare them for evangelism and missionary service. Nevertheless, Christian day school education also takes place in the New Testament age which is dominated by the missionary mandate. For this reason it should not be considered a violation of the school's proper sphere or jurisdiction if Christian day school teachers also press the *missionary* claim of the gospel. In Christian day schools, too, students must be confronted with the call to Christian discipleship and need to have the urgency of world evangelism placed before them. Failure to do either or both will have (or already may have had) an adverse effect on Reformed Christian day school education in North America. Reformed Christian day schools of course do not exist exclusively or even chiefly for purposes of evangelism and mission, but they ignore their evangelistic role at the peril of being less than truly Christian schools.

In conclusion, the Reformed Christian lives in an inevitable state of tension between the pull of creation and the urgency of redemption. Until Christ returns, that will continue to be the case. What is needed above all, therefore, is spiritual discernment. That is a subject

for our next chapter, which deals with the work of God the Holy Spirit.

Notes

1. *Institutes*, IV.xx.4.
2. *To Be Near Unto God*, translated by J.H. DeVries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979; reprint), p. 33.
3. *Institutes*, III.x.1.
4. *Ibid.*
5. For a brilliant and creative defense of an affirmative answer to this question see Herbert Richardson, *Toward an American Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 108-160. Also note Calvin's statement that, "Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly to reach God without a Mediator" (*Institutes*, II.xii.2). Yet also see *Institutes* II.xii.4 and 5 where Calvin rejects the idea that Christ would have become man if Adam had not sinned. What this suggests is that for Calvin, Christ was needed as a mediator between God and man even if he had not sinned, but that the form of such mediation would not have required an incarnation.
6. *Institutes*, II.ii.1. The argument I am setting forth in the next few paragraphs directly follows Calvin in Book II of the *Institutes*.
7. *Ibid.*, II.ii.7; II.iii.5. Calvin makes the distinction between necessity and compulsion to underscore that while man is "totally depraved," that is to say incapable of saving good, he is a sinner by his own choice. The necessity arises from an inner, voluntary compulsion rather than an external one.
8. *Ibid.*, II.vi.1.
9. *Ibid.*, II.xv.5.
10. *Ibid.*, II.xiii.4.
11. See for example the brilliant treatment of I Corinthians 13 by Lewis B. Smedes, *Love Within Limits* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). The examples that follow are from Smedes.
12. For a more detailed theological reflection on the relationship between the church institute and the broader socio-cultural world see my essay "Church and World: A Trinitarian Perspective," *Calvin Theological Journal*, XVIII (1983), 5-31. The conclusion of the essay summarizes the point I have been making in this chapter in this way:

Consequently true Christian ministry to the world cannot be limited or reduced to the ministry of the institutional church, nor should the church attempt to embrace all "Christian activity in the world." The church has a specific, soteriologically defined task to proclaim in word and deed the gospel of reconciliation in Christ. Its integrity as church with respect to the world is maintained to the degree that it is faithful to this task. While the proclamation of the gospel of justification/reconciliation has a certain priority in a sinful, unreconciled world, this proclamation is not the only Christian obligation in the world. Furthermore, the structure of and the life of the church

community formed by the gospel and which exists for its propagation cannot become the exclusive norm for all areas of human existence. The church ministers to the world not by attempting to embrace all of human existence and making it church but by its faithful ministry of the Word which calls the world truly to be the creation which God fashioned through His Wisdom and destined for His sabbath glory.

5.

God the Holy Spirit, Sanctification and Holiness

The subject of this chapter is the work of God the Holy Spirit as the Reformed tradition understands it. There are few Christians today who have not to some degree or other been forced to reflect on the work of the Holy Spirit in recent years because of the Pentecostal-charismatic phenomenon of the twentieth century. Christians who call themselves “Pentecostal” or “charismatic” do have some justifiable reasons for speaking of the twentieth century as the century of the Holy Spirit. Not only have Pentecostal churches been the fastest growing Christian churches throughout the world but even the large mainline denominations such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican (Episcopal), Presbyterian, United, and Lutheran churches have been affected by significant charismatic movements within. No Christian can be indifferent today to the presence and reality of charismatic, Holy Spirit-emphasizing Christianity even if one remains primarily an observer of the phenomenon. Even observers, if they are sensitive Christians, cannot help but be challenged to reflect upon the role of the Holy Spirit in their own Christian experience.

The concern in this chapter is not so much to evaluate the Pentecostal-charismatic phenomenon but to present an overall Reformed perspective on the work of God the Holy Spirit. What strikes one therefore is that while the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has placed the work of the Holy Spirit on the ecclesiastical and theological table, it has also fostered a tendency to narrow the focus of the Holy Spirit's work. In the first place the emphasis, especially within the Pentecostal churches, has often been placed on the dramatic exercise of certain gifts such as tongue-speaking, prophesying, and healing, while other less spectacular gifts such as teaching, helping, serving, giving and administering (see I Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:6-8) are played down. In practice if not in intention the individual and particular gifts are often emphasized at the expense of the universal fruit of the Spirit including love, peace, patience, kindness and gentleness, with the result that the charismatic movement has on occasion been a source of discord and unrest in the churches. (In fairness, this unrest can hardly be said to be the sole responsibility of impatient or unkind charismatic Christians. However, they are not without blame either.) Finally, and this is the most fundamental question, the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has drawn our attention to it, is too narrowly restricted to the Holy Spirit's work in renewal and redemption after Pentecost. The work of the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost in creation and culture, providence, and history is generally ignored. What is especially striking is the fact that subjective experience, regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit, tends to set aside and downplay the Spirit-inspired Scripture as the main source of direction and counsel in the Christian's life.

The Holy Spirit in the Reformed Tradition

The charismatic critique of the church, also as it is directed at Reformed churches, must therefore be taken seriously but not uncritically. The accusation, for example, that the classic Reformed tradition, including the Reformed confessions and great Reformed theologians are virtually silent on the work of the Holy Spirit is simply untrue. To be sure, Calvin in his *Institutes* does not deal with the question of speaking in tongues. Calvin, like the majority of significant Christian theologians from the early church up to the twentieth century, considered tongue-speaking and prophecy, along with certain other *charismata*, to be phenomena limited to the apostolic church. It should be noted that some twentieth century Reformed theologians (eg. E.H. Andrews,¹ Richard Gaffin,² Anthony Hoekema³) still maintain this view on biblical-theological grounds even *after* the rise of the Pentecostal-charismatic phenomenon. Calvin's judgment on this score simply reflects the limitations of his own experience and time. To expect more of him or the Reformed Confessions after him would be unfair. Yet, in Calvin's theology, the Holy Spirit is hardly absent—nothing in fact could be farther from the truth.

Calvin's great classic exposition of the Christian faith is his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The *Institutes* are divided into four major sections or books, and the division is strictly trinitarian. Book I deals with the knowledge of God the Creator, Book II with the knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ and Books III and IV with the internal and external work of God the Holy Spirit incorporating us into and keeping us in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. In the most recent English edition of the *Institutes* it is worth noting that there are 534 pages devoted to the work of God the Father and God the Son and no less than 997 pages to the work of God the Holy Spirit. The number of pages devoted to

the work of the Holy Spirit is twice that devoted to the Father and Son together. The judgment of the great American Presbyterian theologian Benjamin Warfield is worth citing at this point. After noting Calvin's considerable contributions to theology in general, Warfield states the following:

It is probable however that Calvin's greatest contribution to theological science lies in the rich development which he gives—and which he was the first to give—to the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit. No doubt, from the origin of Christianity, everyone who has been even slightly imbued with the Christian spirit has believed in the Holy Spirit as the author and giver of life, and has attributed all that is good in the world, and particularly in himself, to His holy offices. And, of course, in treating of grace, Augustine worked out the doctrine of salvation as a subjective experience with great vividness and in great detail, and the whole course of this salvation was fully understood, no doubt, to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

But in the same sense in which we may say that the doctrine of sin and grace dates from Augustine, the doctrine of satisfaction from Anselm, the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift from Calvin to the Church. It was he who first related the whole experience of salvation specifically to the working of the Holy Spirit, worked it out into its details, and contemplated its several steps and stages in orderly progress as the product of the Holy Spirit's specific work in applying salvation to the soul. Thus he gave systematic and adequate expression to the whole doctrine of the Holy Spirit and made it the assured possession of the Church of God.

Here then is probably Calvin's greatest contribution to theological development. In his hands, for the first time in the history of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit comes to its rights. Into the heart of none more than into his

did the vision of the glory of God shine, and no one has been more determined than he not to give the glory of God to another. Who has been more devoted than he to the Savior, by whose blood he has been bought? But, above everything else, it is the sense of the sovereign working of salvation by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit which characterizes all Calvin's thought of God. And above everything else he deserves, therefore, the great name of *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*.⁴

Charismatic Christians within the Reformed churches may be somewhat surprised to hear John Calvin spoken of as *the theologian of the Holy Spirit*. Nevertheless, even though Warfield wrote these words before the Pentecostal-charismatic movement had its major impact upon the Christian church of the twentieth century, his judgment is still valid. The late great Calvin scholar and translator of the *Institutes*, Ford Lewis Battles, for example, considered the theme of "piety" as the key to understanding Calvin.⁵ By piety Calvin means "that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces."⁶ Anyone who reads Calvin's works carefully cannot help being struck by this repeated emphasis upon piety and spirituality. Faith, for Calvin, was a matter of the *heart* renewed as it is by the Holy Spirit. Calvin defines faith thus: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."⁷ To suggest therefore that the Reformed understanding of faith is cold and intellectual, a matter of the head rather than the heart, is to be untrue to its genius. Calvin explicitly rejects such an intellectualizing of faith. Commenting on the medieval scholastic debate whether faith is merely intellectual assent or something added on to intellectual assent Calvin writes:

Therefore they (scholastic theologians, j.b.) babble childishly in asking whether faith is the same faith when it has been formed by a superadded quality; or whether it be a new and different thing. From such chatter it certainly looks as if they never thought about the *unique gift of the Spirit*. For the beginning of believing already contains within itself the reconciliation whereby man approaches God. But if they weighed Paul's saying, "With the *heart* a man believes unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10), they would cease to invent that *cold quality of faith*.

If we possessed only this one reason, it would have been sufficient to end the dispute: that very assent itself—as I have already partially suggested, and will reiterate more fully—*is more of the heart than of the brain*, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.⁸

This emphasis upon piety, upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, is reflected in Calvin's personal motto, *cor meum tibi offero domine, prompte et sincere* (I offer my heart to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely).

Not only John Calvin but the great Dutch Reformed thinker Abraham Kuyper can be said to be a theologian of the Holy Spirit. Kuyper's lengthy work on the Holy Spirit,⁹ which runs to 649 pages in the English translation, still remains one of the greatest expositions of the subject. Throughout his life Kuyper emphasized the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration (*palingenesis*) not only as it affects the individual Christian but as it creates an antithesis within human life and culture. "This 'regeneration,' according to Kuyper, breaks humanity in two, and repeals the unity of the human consciousness." There is as a result a division in the human race—two kinds of people who create two different cultures which, while they do have certain elements in common, are in their core antithetically opposed one to another. Kuyper sums it up this way:

We speak none too emphatically, therefore, when we speak of two kinds of people. Both are human, but one is inwardly different from the other, and consequently feels a different content rising from his consciousness; thus they face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses. And the fact that there are two kinds of *people* occasions of necessity the fact of two kinds of human *life* and *consciousness* of life, and of two kinds of *science*; for which reason the idea of the *unity of science*, taken in its absolute sense, implies the denial of the fact of pal-ingensis, (regeneration) and therefore from principle leads to the rejection of the Christian religion.¹⁰

The Catholic, Perfecting Character of the Holy Spirit's Activity

Even this brief glance at two major Reformed thinkers makes it abundantly clear that the Reformed tradition is not silent about the work of the Holy Spirit. The citations from Abraham Kuyper however, do reveal something distinctive about the Reformed, Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit's work, namely its "catholic" or universal character. In the first two chapters of the book it was argued that "catholicity" sums up the Reformed emphasis on the whole of life as service to the triune God. The principle, *tota scriptura*, all of Scripture for all of life, is the formal basis for such catholicity. With respect to the work of the Holy Spirit it then becomes clear that this activity is much broader than personal regeneration. The work of the Holy Spirit, too, is catholic and includes, among other things, activity in creation, inspiration of Scripture, human history, preparation for the incarnation and the incarnation itself, equipping our Lord for His ministry, and judgment of sin.

It is this principle of catholicity, rooted in *tota scriptura*, that directs us to consider the work of the Holy Spirit before and beyond the outpouring at

Pentecost. Already in Genesis 1:2, for example, we are told of the work of the Spirit of God in creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and a darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the *Spirit of God* was moving over the face of the waters" (my emphasis).

What then is the proper work of the Holy Spirit? The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 8 describes it as "sanctification." Calvin, recall, puts it this way: "To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity."¹¹ A similar division of the triune activity is given by Abraham Kuyper: "In every work effected by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in common, the power *to bring forth* proceeds from the Father; the power *to arrange* from the Son; the power *to perfect* from the Holy Spirit." Kuyper cites I Corinthians 8:6 ("There is but one God the Father, *of* whom are all things") and Romans 11:38 ("For *of* Him and *through* Him and *to* Him are all things") and then notes: "The operation here spoken of is threefold: first, that by which all things are originated (*of* Him); second, that by which all things consist (*through* Him); third, that by which all things attain their final destiny (*to* Him)."¹²

Everything was thus created for a purpose, a destiny. "Thus," according to Kuyper, "to lead the creature to its destiny, to cause it to develop according to its nature, to make it perfect, is the proper work of the Holy Spirit."¹³ "The Father brings forth, the Son disposes and arranges, the Holy Spirit perfects."¹⁴ The final purpose of all creation is of course the glory of the triune God. This work of perfecting, or making complete, of bringing all creation to its final destiny, the glory of God, we should note, is not limited to the post-fall sinful situation. God, we are told in Genesis 2:2-3, rested from His work on the seventh day and thus blessed it and "hallowed" or "sanctified" it. And this

was before the fall! Sanctification, becoming more holy, does not only mean negatively cleansing from sin but more importantly, positively achieving that for which God created us, namely final and complete fellowship with God, in other words, His glory. Adam did not yet have eternal life. The sabbath therefore, man eternally resting in God's presence, was for Adam and is for us the goal of creation. The work of the Spirit, like that of the Son described in the previous chapter, does not annihilate or even set aside creation; rather, it affirms it and brings it to its highest destiny.

The entry of sin into the world does not fundamentally alter this work of the Holy Spirit. Sin is "a power appeared to keep man and nature *from their destiny*. Hence the Holy Spirit must *antagonize* sin; His calling is to annihilate it, and despite its opposition to cause the elect children of God and the entire creation to reach their end. Redemption is therefore not a *new* work *added* to that of the Holy Spirit, but is identical with it."¹⁵ The Spirit opposes not the creation but sin and misdirection within the creation. The work of the Spirit too affirms the principle that salvation is the *restoration* of creation. In order therefore properly to understand the work of the Holy Spirit we must begin not with redemption but creation, not with Pentecost but with Genesis. This too parallels our discussion in the previous chapter on the work of God the Son.

The Holy Spirit in Creation and Providence

That the Holy Spirit was and still is directly involved in creation is the clear testimony of Scripture. Consider, for example, Elihu's statement in Job: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4) or the Psalmist's confession, "When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:30). Numerous references to the Spirit of God or the "breath of God" can be found in Scripture.

The word for spirit in Hebrew and Greek is the same as the word for breath, wind, air. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6). "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). "By His wind the heavens were made fair; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent" (Job 26:13). Like fire, the "breath of God" and the "wind" in Scripture all signify the work of the Holy Spirit. Just before His ascension Jesus *breathed* on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). "The wind blows where it wills," Jesus said to Nicodemus, "and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:9). The Holy Spirit, in short, is the divine source of life and all new life in creation and in redemption.

The Holy Spirit, the Reformed tradition emphasizes, is not only the creating principle of life in all things but also the source of what we usually refer to as creativity in man. Even after it was corrupted by human sin, human nature still had many gifts left to it by the Spirit of God. According to Calvin whenever we encounter such gifts, be they in the arts or in mechanical skills or even in government and household management, we are to give thanks to the Holy Spirit. "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth," writes Calvin, "we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it whenever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we condemn and reproach the Spirit Himself."¹⁶ The Scripture passage usually referred to here is Exodus 31:1-5:

The Lord said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the *Spirit of God*, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic

designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every craft” (my emphasis, j.b.).

Scripture also testifies that the Holy Spirit is active in equipping men and women for special historical tasks of leadership. Thus when Moses wearies of the task of leading the quarrelsome people of Israel and finds the burden too much we are told:

And the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone . . .” (Numbers 11:16, 17).

In the book of Judges, time and again we are told that a judge (Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and even Samson (14:6, 15:14)) was taken hold of by God’s spirit in order to perform the necessary feats to deliver Israel. Even the heathen King Cyrus is said to be the Lord’s anointed in Isaiah 45. It is clear, therefore, that Scripture testifies to a *general* work of the Holy Spirit in creation and history which is distinct from the post-Pentecost work of regeneration and creating new life in the believer. It is clear that the “Spirit of the Lord” which came upon Samson and gave him his incredible strength was not what Paul in Romans 1:4 calls the “Spirit of holiness.” The Spirit of God equips men for certain tasks without sanctifying them or renewing them and He distributes these, according to Calvin, “to whomever He wills, for the common good of mankind.” Calvin then goes on to deal with the objection, “What have the impious, who are utterly estranged from God, to do with His Spirit?” He answers: “We ought to understand the statement that the Spirit of God

dwells only in believers (Romans 8:9) as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples to God (I Corinthians 3:16). Nonetheless He fills, moves, and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit, and does so according to the character that He bestowed upon each kind by the law of creation."¹⁷ The most magnificent gifts the Spirit bestows in a general way upon mankind are, however, insufficient to bring their recipients to a true knowledge of God. Even the most gifted are still spiritually blind apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin puts it this way: "They are like a traveler passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step—let alone be directed on his way by its help."¹⁸ The way to the kingdom of God is closed except to those illumined by the Holy Spirit.

We should take note of what is involved in this illumining work of the Holy Spirit. The first work of the Holy Spirit that must be considered is of course the inspiration of Scripture. "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man," says Peter, "but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Peter 1:21). When it comes to the great acts of redemption to which the inspired Scriptures bear witness, it is the Holy Spirit's power that equips those used by God for His purpose. We have noted the work of the Spirit in equipping the judges to be the saviors in Israel. Saul's ministry as king over Israel is only possible when the Spirit of God is with him. When the Spirit leaves him, Saul is lost as king. But most importantly, our Lord's ministry is characterized from beginning to end by the power of the Spirit. Jesus is conceived and born not of the will of man but by the Spirit of God. He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness and begins His ministry by being baptized by John and anointed by the Spirit of God descending like a dove from heaven (Matthew 3:13-4:1). In His first sermon, Jesus acknowledges the Spirit's commission and power

behind His ministry by citing Isaiah 61:2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 19). And finally, Paul attributes the resurrection life of our Lord and His victory over death to the Spirit when he speaks of Jesus as being “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

The Goal of Holiness

The Holy Spirit which equipped our Lord to fulfill His mission for us is also the God that unites us to Christ and enables us to receive the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work. The Holy Spirit is the source of faith and newness of life. That new life must, however, be seen in all its eschatological fullness. When, in the Creed, we confess, “I believe a holy, catholic church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting,” we should remember that we are at that point making a confession concerning the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who perfects and completes. Forgiveness of sins is the beginning, but the consummation is life everlasting in glory. Both as applied to the believer are the proper work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is the Spirit of holiness. God is holy, and for God and man to have fellowship, man must receive the indwelling Spirit of holiness. If the incarnation signifies “Immanuel—God with us,” then Pentecost represents an even more intimate fellowship with God—we are His temple, He dwells in us (I Corinthians 3:16, 6:16). In a sinful world, holiness demands separation. Consider the words of the Apostle Paul:

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or

what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1).

This principle of holiness dominates Scripture. The very structure of the book of Genesis shows how God was separating a people unto Himself, calling Abraham from a pagan past and making a covenant with him in order that Abraham might walk before Him and be perfect (Genesis 17:7). The purpose of Israel's exodus, her worship at Sinai, and the numerous ceremonial laws of the Pentateuch was that Israel be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests because her God was holy (see Exodus 19:6, Leviticus 11:44, 45, 19:2, 20:6). A holy people brought by God into a holy land were not only commanded not to mix clean and unclean, holy and unholy, sacred and profane things, but also to separate themselves from the pagan customs of the nations by destroying the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Israel's numerous ceremonial laws were to teach her the spiritual principle of discernment, of distinguishing that which promotes holiness from that which pollutes or corrupts.

While the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament are no longer literally binding on New Testament Christians, the principle of imitating a holy God, of being holy because He is holy is not less binding. We too are

told by our Lord that we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). We too are reminded by the Apostle Peter: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' " (I Peter 1:16). It is thus the clear teaching of Scripture that we are called to holy living, and because we live in a sinful world, holiness also demands of Christians a certain separation. Incidentally, that is one of the reasons why the book of Leviticus ought not to be overlooked by New Testament Christians. Its principles are still instructive in the matter of holy living.

Holiness and Separation from the World?

It needs to be said very clearly that the Reformed tradition, while affirming the full value of and joy in God's creation and human culture, has also, in its best representatives, insisted upon personal and communal holiness as the essential hallmark of such creational living. The doctrines of creation and sanctification may not be set in opposition to one another. The relation of the two can be seen by briefly considering Abraham Kuyper's argument in his *Lectures on Calvinism*. The Calvinist, Kuyper notes, does not seek to avoid the world by creating a new society of saints within the present sinful age. "The Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate. He feels, rather, this high calling to push the development of this world to an even higher stage, and to do this in constant accordance with God's ordinance, for the sake of God, upholding, in the midst of so much painful corruption, everything that is honorable, lovely, and of good report among men."¹⁹ It is, in fact, for Kuyper a high view of creation that prevents him from a cosmic other-worldliness. This is our Father's world!

But this same culturally sensitive and politically ac-

tive Abraham Kuyper does go on to qualify his argument by noting an exception.

This admits of only one exception, and this exception I wish both to maintain and to place in its proper light. What I mean is this. Not *every* intimate intercourse with the unconverted world is deemed lawful, by Calvinism, for it places a barrier against the too unhallowed influence of this world by putting a distinct “veto” upon three things, *card playing, theaters, and dancing*.²⁰

This seems on the face of it a remarkable and surprising qualification. The principle that “not *every* intimate intercourse with the unconverted world is deemed lawful” and that “a barrier against the too unhallowed influence of this world” is needed is quite reasonable, but why should these three forms of amusement be singled out? Why not politics or sports? Or, even more reasonably, why not distinguish between relatively innocent children’s card games such as *Old Maid* and hard-core gambling, between theater and dance that might be considered wholesome or moral and that which is not. Why condemn these activities as such?

Similar questions could be raised against the much-maligned (in recent years at least) Report on Worldly Amusements presented to and adopted by the 1928 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church.²¹ It is singularly unfortunate that this Report is known only by its condemnation of the three by now famous amusements, theatre, dancing and card playing. Again the same questions arise, why were *amusements* singled out and why these three? The most frequently condemned form of worldliness in the New Testament is not dancing (on which it is totally silent) but materialism, the love of mammon or money. To be silent on worldly mammonism while warning stridently about worldly entertainment only reinforces the long-standing impression that the Reformed, and especially the Puritan-Reformed tradition is opposed to all forms of fun.

Puritans, the old saw goes, were opposed to the sport of bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. While the Report insists upon the necessity of legitimate recreation and play in the life of the Christian, its specific prohibitions were easy to caricature and even many Christian Reformed people today consider them with a certain superior amused air as quaint and irrelevant. The Report deserves better, and its general thrust is worth summarizing.

The Report is divided into three parts: I. "General Principles" including "The Honor of God," "The Welfare of Man," "Christian Separation from the World," and "Christian Liberty"; II. "Application of the Foregoing Principles to Three Forms of Amusements" namely "Theatre Attendance," "Movie Attendance," "Dancing," and "Card Playing and other Games of Chance"; III. "Worldly Amusements and the Church." Part one of the Report is excellent and worthy of study still today. The Report acknowledges a human need for play and recreation but also correctly notes that our play should be of a secondary, subordinate significance, and truly be recreative and conducive to our physical, spiritual and moral well-being. In a time where even many Reformed people live for sports and waste time on mindless video games, that is still a valid point. Furthermore, the Report properly calls attention to the fact that in a sinful world the spirit of holiness is a spirit of antithesis and separation. Finally, the Report concludes its section on general principles with an excellent discussion on Christian liberty. It notes that believers are free in their conscience from the burden of the law and free with respect to the *adiaphora*, the indifferent matters of life in which the Scripture makes no judgment. It also, again correctly, reminds us that Christian liberty is limited by the law of love, and by the need to renounce certain things either because of our own spiritual weakness or because of an obvious association with evil. All of this is well stated

and worthy of serious consideration.

The difficulty with the Report is that it then goes on to contradict its own discussion of the principle of Christian liberty and makes the famous three specific amusements censurable by the church. It is this latter point that created innumerable problems in the Christian Reformed Church in the decades of the thirties, forties and fifties of this century. Actual practice and church policy were in many cases miles apart. After many years of discussion, the Christian Reformed Synod of 1967 adopted a new statement on the Film Arts and the Synod of 1982 a new policy on dancing. The latter discussion and decision was greeted with some merriment by the United States media, even making the National Television news. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before the Christian Reformed Synod makes an official pronouncement concerning *Flinch*, *Old Maid*, and *Uno*.

Above everything else it is important to maintain a sense of humor in all of this sombre and serious discussion. It does seem somewhat odd that Reformed people who are so affirmative and even sophisticated in many "worldly" areas such as business and commerce, education, and even politics could be so "fundamentalist" in their views on "worldly amusements." Does such a stance not encourage legalism, hypocrisy and self-righteousness and all the other nasty character traits so often hurled at the Reformed and especially the Puritan-Reformed tradition?

It must be granted that the Reformed community has had its share of these faults. Not only in its stance on "amusement" but also in an excessive sabbatarianism it has indeed often been legalistic and joyless. Neither legalism nor joylessness, in spite of the caricatures one still encounters in history textbooks today, are fair characterizations of Calvin's thought. Calvin's exposition of Christian freedom in Book III, chapter 19 of the *Institutes* remains *the* definitive treatment of the subject. Christians, Calvin insists, must believe that, being

saved by grace, they are free *from* the curse of the law and free *to* serve God in joy. Very importantly, this freedom applies to things outward and “indifferent” where “we are not bound before God by any religious obligations preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them.” He then adds the crucial point: “And the knowledge of this freedom is very necessary for us, for if it is lacking, our consciences will have no repose and there will be no end to superstitions.”²² What is the purpose of such freedom? That we may with thanksgiving, glorify God the maker and giver of all gifts.

To sum up we see whither this freedom tends: namely, that we should use God’s gifts for the purpose for which He gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind. With such confidence our minds will be at peace with Him, and will recognize His liberality toward us. For here are included all ceremonies whose observance is optional, that our consciences may not be constrained by any necessity to observe them but may remember that by God’s beneficence their use is for edification made subject to Him.²³

For that reason the Christian Reformed Church, if it was to be faithful to the Reformed acceptance of the biblical principle of Christian liberty, had little choice but to change its stance with respect to the theater and dancing. Having had to make that shift has, however, left an erroneous impression in the church. What is usually forgotten, or conveniently ignored, is that both the Synodical Film Arts Report of 1967 and the Synodical Dance Report of 1982 continue to insist upon the need for holiness and spiritual discernment. Because the 1928 Report explicitly condemned the two amusements, something the 1967 and 1982 Reports properly refused to do, the general perception in the Christian Reformed Church and in the broader world is simply that formerly movies and dancing were judged to be inappropriate Christian activities and now they are

permissible. The net effect of the Christian Reformed synodical pronouncements has, thus, been simply to open the door—the call for spiritual discernment and living distinct, holy, separated lives is not heard. In large measure the church has only itself to blame for this turn of events. Its earlier position, declaring certain activities as in themselves censurable, was untenable and unworkable.

This question of “worldly amusements” has been discussed in some detail in this chapter not because it is such an edifying episode in Reformed experience but because it illustrates an important point; namely, that the Reformed tradition, notwithstanding its affirmation of creation and the “world,” has also been profoundly concerned about the problem of “worldliness.” The Reformed tradition has, in its best representatives, insisted upon Spirit-inspired, holy living. While it has not always worked out this principle of sanctification consistently and has undoubtedly fallen into the dangers of legalism and possibly even some hypocrisy, it must be granted that it has taken the concern for holiness every bit as seriously as Christian traditions which have made it their hallmark. The challenge before the Reformed community today is to affirm the principle of holiness in theory and in practice without falling back into legalism and joyless sanctimoniousness. The threat of the latter must not, however, stand in the way of the former.

As this chapter comes to a close it should reiterate what was noted earlier, namely, that the Reformed tradition is very rich in its reflection upon the work of the Holy Spirit. It sees the working of God’s Spirit as that which leads to the sanctification and renewal of *all* things. Its vision of the Spirit is thus truly “catholic.” One more thing needs to be said here, however, in response to the reaction that can be anticipated from charismatic Christians at this point. The objection to what has been written in this chapter will undoubtedly go something like this: It is all well and good for you to quote all these Reformed theologians, but that is just so

many words. You *talk* a great deal about the Spirit but we seek the living *experience* of the Spirit and that is missing in your Reformed church with all its traditions, theology and grand talk. The Spirit needs to be experienced, not talked about, even in pious-sounding theological discussion.

The direct and honest response to this objection is that of course the experience and reality of the Spirit cannot be replaced by talk about the Spirit. It is the actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit that makes us “spiritual,” that is to say, filled with and led by the Spirit. If we are not spiritual we are not Christian. Calvin heartily concurs. “The Holy Spirit,” he notes, “is the bond by which Christ effectively unites us to Himself.”²⁴ In recent years, it is especially the Pentecostal-charismatic movement that has challenged the Christian Church including the Reformed churches to be “filled with the Spirit.” That challenge must be taken seriously. While it is true that many charismatic Christians whose lives have been renewed by the charismatic movement make the error of judging fellow church members by their own formerly unspiritual way of life, Reformed Christians must in all honesty confess that their communities do not always display the full fruit of the Spirit nor encourage the expression of the Spirit’s gifts. Where Reformed Christians beg to differ with their Pentecostal brothers and sisters and also with some charismatic Christians is on the doctrine of a “second-blessing” or post-conversion “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” Classical Pentecostalism considers the baptism with the Holy Spirit as an added endowment, a second stage in the Christian experience. Reformed Christians do not deny that there may be special release of the Spirit’s power for ministry at given moments but insist that all true believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:13).

What must not be forgotten, however, is that in the

Reformed tradition, the faithful preaching of and living by the Word of God is the heart of true spirituality and worship. And Word and Spirit are inseparable. The Word is inspired by the Spirit and constitutes the chief means by which the Spirit works in the world to bring men to fellowship with God in Christ. The Spirit works through the Word and the Word is confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit. Calvin sums it up beautifully when he says:

For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of His Word and of His Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize Him in His own image, namely, in the Word. So indeed it is. God did not bring forth His Word among men for the sake of a momentary display, intending at the coming of His Spirit to abolish it. Rather, He sent down the same Spirit by whose power He had dispensed the Word, to complete His work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.²⁵

The one immediate and practical consequence of this conviction is that God's guidance in life is not so much to be sought in extraordinary means of revelation such as visions and dreams but by listening to the Spirit in the **Word**. One of the things that Reformed Christians find so problematic among Pentecostal-charismatic Christians is the relative ease with which subjective opinions are regarded as indubitable leadings of the Holy Spirit. One often hears comments such as the following among Pentecostals and charismatics: I am waiting for the Lord to reveal to me what I must do. The Lord gave me this song or message or conviction or directive. The Lord sent me to . . . Among other Christians there is also a tendency to identify certain historical movements as undoubted evidences or signs of the Spirit of God. The Reformed Christian, convinced that God's

revelation is given in the Spirit-inspired Scripture, will see the Spirit's direction and command there and be modestly skeptical about any subjective claims involving the Spirit. The Word is still the chief means by which the Spirit speaks and leads men and women today.

This concludes the third part of what has in effect been one long discourse over three chapters on what it means to be Reformed. To be Reformed is to be truly trinitarian and catholic. It is to recognize that we are called to live in the Father's creation by the grace of the Son and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are to be disciples of Jesus Christ living holy lives in God's good (but sin-stained) creation. And of course to be Reformed is not merely to *know* what trinitarian, catholic theology is, but to *live* it. We are called to holy worldliness.

Notes

1. *The Promise of the Spirit* (Evangelical Press: Welwyn, Great Britain, 1982).
2. *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).
3. *What About Tongue Speaking?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).
4. *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), pp. 485-487.
5. See his beautifully translated and edited work, *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978). Another illuminating treatment of Calvin's spirituality is Lucien Joseph Richards, *The Spirituality of John Calvin* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974).
6. *Institutes*, I.ii.1.
7. *Ibid.*, III.ii.7.
8. *Ibid.*, III.ii.8., my emphasis.
9. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, translated by Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941). For much of what follows in this chapter I am indebted to Kuyper's work.
10. *Principles of Sacred Theology*, translated by J.H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 152, 155.
11. *Institutes*, I.xiii.18.
12. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 19, 20.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

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16. *Institutes*, II.ii.15.

17. *Ibid.*, II.ii.16.

18. *Ibid.*, II.ii.18.

19. *Lectures on Calvinism*, p. 73.

20. *Ibid.*

21. This Report can be found in the 1928 *Acts of Synod* of the Christian Reformed Church. The Report and Synod's decisions were published in a separate booklet by the Christian Reformed Church entitled, *Worldly Amusements in the Light of Scripture*.

22. *Institutes*, III.xix.7.

23. *Ibid.*, III.xix.8.

24. *Ibid.*, III.i.1.

25. *Ibid.*, I.ix.3.

6.

Reformed Christian Education

The matter of Christian day school education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels has been touched upon in previous chapters of this volume. In this chapter I will attempt to summarize some points that have already been made and set forth a more comprehensive trinitarian vision of Reformed Christian education.

Education in the Reformed Tradition

The Reformed tradition has always prized good education. Reformed churches from Calvin's day on have always insisted upon a well-educated clergy and have established schools to provide good theological education for prospective ministers. As a result Reformed churches have generally also been relatively theologically sophisticated and doctrinally self-conscious in local congregations as well as at the highest level of church assemblies. Doctrinal, if not explicitly catechetical preaching, has always been a distinctive feature of Reformed preaching. Reformed preaching seeks to instruct and teach as well as inspire. Furthermore, a regular program of catechizing has always been

an important factor in maintaining an alert, doctrinally self-conscious Reformed church. The concern for education, however, extends beyond the requisite theological training for ministers of the gospel and the catechetical instruction in the church. Article 21 in the classic church order of the famous Reformed Synod of Dort (1618-19) reads as follows: "Everywhere consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters, who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, language and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism."¹ This article, already accepted by the Dutch Reformed churches as early as 1586, does, of course, reflect the key role of the officially supported Reformed Church in the "public" education of children. The church to some degree at least could oversee and regulate the "schoolmasters." With the development of a *government* sponsored and controlled school system in which the churches as such no longer played a significant role, the Christian Reformed Church in North America revised this article of its church order in 1914. The revised article, relevant to education, reads as follows: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."²

The revision is striking in at least two aspects, also noticeable when one compares it with the relevant articles in the old Dort church order and the new revised church order adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod in 1965. The 1965 article reads: "The consistory shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools, and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant."³ The Synod of Dort was concerned about "schoolmasters;" the 1914 revision expresses concerns about "schools." When the 1914 revision is compared with the 1965 revision, it is clear that the earlier article, while not in any way rejecting the idea of *separate*

Reformed Christian day schools, does leave open the possibility that Protestant evangelical-controlled *public* schools might also fit the bill. Consistories were simply instructed to “see to it that there are good Christian schools.” While the Christian Reformed community did indeed establish many separate, parent-controlled Christian day schools in this century, the Reformed Church of America continued, until recently, to support firmly what it generally perceived to be protestant public schools. In an illuminating article published in *The Banner* entitled “Does the Issue of Christian Schools Keep the RCA and CRC Apart,” New Brunswick Theological Seminary President Howard Hageman traces this difference between the two major “Reformed” communities in North America. He suggests that the gradual shift in public education from Protestant to secular control has led many in the RCA to re-examine their traditional support of the public school system. He also notes: “However, it must be clearly stated that the Reformed Church would not be ready to require parents to support Christian schools as a condition for membership.”⁴ He implies that the Christian Reformed Church tends towards this requirement. Does it?

While the 1914 article at least theoretically leaves open the *possibility* of support for protestant *public* schools (even if it was not so understood by the Christian Reformed community) the 1965 revision makes it clear that separate, parent-controlled schools are the ideal. “The consistory shall encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools; and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant.” While support for Christian day school education is not an additional requirement for church membership in the Christian Reformed Church, and its members are not censured for failure to send their children to such schools, the church order would seem to imply that support for such schools is a requirement for office-bearers.

Thus far our discussion has simply taken note of the high value the Reformed tradition places on education in general. In the light of the previous chapters of this book, a plausible theological reason for this prized attitude toward education would seem to be the Reformed emphasis upon and the priority of the doctrine of creation and the consequent value placed upon human culture as a vocation before God and performed to His glory. The call for good schools which shall “instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts” (Church Order of Dort) is thus a valid Reformed emphasis consistent with fundamental Reformed convictions about creation and human cultural activity as vocation before the face of God. What is intriguing about the 1914 and 1965 revisions of the church order, in contrast to the Dort order, is that the covenant of grace is cited as the primary theological reason for Christian day school education. Parents, it is suggested, ought to be urged by consistories to see to it that their children are instructed in Christian schools “according to the demands of the covenant.”

The Covenant and Christian Education

This brings us to a very important question—Is the doctrine of the covenant of grace, the promise that God is a God to believers and their seed (Genesis 17:7, I Corinthians 7:14), and the covenant obligation of parents to nurture their children in the ways of the Lord, a valid and sufficient ground for the insistence upon Christian day school education? Is the doctrine of the covenant, which Reformed people use to substantiate their practice of children’s baptism, relevant for the school as well as the church? Even if one acknowledges, as one surely must, that the baptismal vow requires that parents, in word and deed, by teaching and example, nurture their children in the rudiments of the Christian religion, in piety and godliness, what does this have to do with culture, with geography, history, chemistry, biology and

gymnastics? Is this all part of the covenantal character of the baptismal vow?

At best I believe the covenant serves as a *motivation* for continuing, outside the home, the nurture of one's children "in the fear of the Lord." It is true that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). Knowledge and wisdom which ignores or aggressively denies the "fear of the Lord" would set up an alternative religious vision to that which Christian parents are fostering in the home. Covenantal obligations would thus lead Christian parents to schools whose vision of life and practice of nurture is consistent with that of the Christian home. The covenant principle is thus crucial, but it does not give an adequate warrant for teaching mathematics, phonics, geography and French in an explicitly Christian confessional context. The covenant is, as philosophers like to say, a necessary but not sufficient ground for Christian day school education.

In his very instructive booklet, "Toward a Theology of Education," Calvin College emeritis Professor of Education, Nicholas Beversluis, recognizes this when he notes: "By itself, the covenant of grace provides profound *motivation* for religious nurture but little direct warrant for schools as *schools* and for what should go on in them."⁵ He then goes on to suggest that covenant understood in a broader sense as the covenant of creation made with Adam and Eve before the fall is not irrelevant for education. Notes Beversluis:

We have a kind of theological codeword for it, a capsule word. We call it the "covenant of works," thereby tending to change the sense of what this covenant was in *itself* to what, as compared with grace, it now is *not*. What the covenant was in itself, in essence, was a covenant of life and celebration, entailing worship and work, piety and culture.⁶

In this broader sense, of course, covenant has everything to do with education:

That creation covenant in the beginning and, through Jesus Christ, in force today can tell us much about the religious vision that ought to illumine our adult lives and therefore also the education of our children. For in the beginning, in that pristine covenant of life, was the essence of religion: *piety and culture*, undivided and unseparated. In the beginning was education, the kind we want for God's sons and daughters.⁷

Beversluis' suggestion points us in a helpful direction. God's covenantal relationship with man, a relationship under sanction which demands fidelity and obedience with its dual possible outcome, either blessing or judgment, does go back to the original good creation of God and is thus instructive for Christian day school education. The distinction between the covenants of grace and of works is characteristically Reformed and similar to the one made in chapter three of this volume between Christ as mediator of creation and mediator of redemption. It is thus most helpful in underscoring the distinctive educational task of the school in comparison with the church. The covenant of grace thus serves as the primary context for education in the church; the covenant of works for education in the school. Furthermore, the distinction between the two covenants also avoids one of the possible negative implications that arise when one applies the covenant of grace, now very narrowly understood, to the purpose and structure of Christian day schools, namely the danger of an exclusiveness which seeks to protect "our children" from the "world." When Christian education is so narrowly bound to the covenant of grace, it can become isolationist and lose its proper outward-directness. While there may be need for cultural separation, such separation is not properly grounded if it is rooted in the idea of the covenant of grace. Exclusiveness rooted in the cove-

nant of grace much too easily becomes a smug *isolationism*. For this reason Beversluis' suggestion to base a vision of Christian education on a broader understanding of the covenant including the so-called "covenant of works," is theologically correct and useful.

The Kingdom of God and Christian Education

However, its *practical* value seems limited. When the term covenant is used in connection with Christian education it is the baptismal vow and the covenant of grace that comes to mind. The notion of a "covenant of works" which includes life in creation is not very much alive even in the Reformed communities. Its usefulness beyond those communities is even less. Could the important point that Beversluis and other Reformed thinkers wish to make not be made with the use of a more acceptable theological symbol?⁸ No doubt, among other reasons, some of these inherent difficulties with the covenant idea brought some to seek a new basis for Reformed Christian day school education in the idea of the kingdom of God. The impetus for this shift from covenant to kingdom in the Christian school movement in North America came from the followers of Abraham Kuyper.

For Kuyper, God's sovereignty as King was cosmic, and this cosmic sovereignty demanded that all learning in church and school, albeit in distinctive ways, acknowledges the sovereignty of the triune God. It is because Christ is King and demands our all, that education at all levels be self-consciously, confessionally Christian. True knowledge of reality cannot be obtained apart from the revealing and regenerating work of God's Spirit. Since education equips students for a life of service in the kingdom of God, any education which fails explicitly to acknowledge Jesus as Lord is inadequate. The kingship of Christ demands Christian education. One of the consequences of this emphasis is that a rather sharp distinction is made between church educa-

tion and school education. The former is “faith-education”—the church as institute has the task to nurture faith and lead someone to mature confession of faith—while the school’s task is to uncover the wisdom of God in the creation and the response of man to that wisdom as this is given in human culture. But the two should not be divorced—the church’s primary preaching and teaching obligation is, of course, to proclaim the gospel of the *kingdom*.

Kuyper’s emphasis upon the kingship of Jesus Christ has directly influenced the Christian education movement in North America, particularly that of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto, Ontario. In a summary statement, the educational creed of the original founding organization of the ICS, the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies, reads as follows:

Believing that Scripture reveals certain basic principles intensely relevant to education, we confess: That all scholarship pursued in faithful obedience to the divine mandate will heed the normative direction of God’s Word, will acknowledge His Law to which creation in all its spheres is subject, and will bow before Christ’s Kingship over all scientific work.⁹

ICS senior members James H. Olthuis and Bernard Zylstra, in a suggested educational creed for the Christian school, include the following article on “The Child in the School”:

The student as an imagebearer of the Lord is a whole person to be guided in the educational process toward responsible maturity in preparing for his calling in the unfolding of creation and the coming of the Kingdom of God . . . The basic focus in education is not on the teacher-curriculum—the “subject matter” in the traditional sense—nor on the student. The teaching team of a school, through the unifying curriculum, must guide and lead the pupils so that

they come to learn about creation in the context of the all-inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God. In this light the students in the school are not to be taught adjustment to the morality or the prevailing attitudes of our society; instead they should be led to understand the norms which hold for the various sectors of life as normed dimensions of the Lord's Kingdom and reign in human history. In this way the school takes its place in leading the child to the understanding that life is meaningful if that child assumes his place in society as one of God's representatives.¹⁰

This emphasis upon the kingdom of God as *the* framework for Christian education has been gaining ground in Reformed educational circles beyond the ICS community. In a recent working paper for the Christian Schools International Task Force on the Future of Christian Education, Nicholas Beversluis also listed the kingdom of God as his first relevant theological symbol:

In the Reformed tradition, education is education of, by and for the *kingdom* of Jesus Christ. In this perspective, unlike the kingdom perspective of some other Christians, Christ's kingdom is not only a future kingdom, but also a present one; present not only in the hearts of His followers, but also publicly; public not only in the life of individuals, but also collectively in the life of His people united; collectively not only in the church, but also within ordinary society. It is a kingdom initiated and guided by the Holy Spirit.

And so, too, it is a kingdom in which Christ's people are not only *against* certain behavior and societal structures, but are also *for* the transforming of that behavior and those structures. Above all else, Christ's kingdom is not a kingdom of austere power impersonally imposed and ordered from afar, one in which His subjects live in a kind of automatic servility. Rather, it is a kingdom of *covenantal* encounter and response, sustained by the presence and goodness of the One whose

authority is that of the Shepherd King of His Father's sons and daughters. This view of Christ's kingdom provides the charter and vision of Christian education.¹¹

Christian Education and Transformation

This citation from Beversluis is interesting because it ties together covenant and kingdom and also introduces another term that needs to be explored, the idea of transformation, in which the purpose and goal of Christian day school education is seen as seeking to *transform* social, economic and political structures. To some degree, as the citation ably demonstrates, this idea of transformation flows quite readily from the idea of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless transformation is not a *logical* inference from the idea of the kingdom. The kingship or lordship of Jesus Christ could as easily be understood (and has been so understood) to direct the Christian believer to a posture of perpetual opposition to and conflict with the existing culture. It is very plausible to suggest that following Christ as King means to say *no* to worldly culture rather than to transform such culture. The perspective of transforming culture is a very distinctive way of viewing the kingdom of God, and to argue that the Reformed emphasis upon the kingdom of God means that Reformed people favor transformation is to beg the question. Obedience to Christ the King can and has resulted in other socio-cultural options for Christians.

This ambiguity does limit the usefulness of the kingdom idea as the over-arching symbol for Christian education. We must draw the same conclusion about the kingdom idea as we did about the covenant principle, namely that it is a very important *motivational* idea but that it does not really help us in spelling out what schools as *schools* should do. Furthermore, even if we were again to make the valid theological distinction between God's kingdom of grace (especially in the church) and His kingdom of power (more broadly in the world)

the problem remains. Jesus Christ is, as the hymn states, “beautiful Savior” and “King of creation,” but the question of *how* Christians are to follow Christ as King of creation is not resolved simply by making the distinction. It is for this reason that some Reformed thinkers have attempted to specify the nature of such kingdom obedience by introducing the terminology of transformation.¹² The goal of Christian education is not simply the *affirmation* of human culture as a gift from God, nor merely the *interpretation* of Christian faith with the human cultural enterprise, but rather the *transformation* of cultural society. With passion and eloquence Nicholas Wolterstorff states his transformational, or as he prefers to call it, “world-formative” vision thus:

The social world in which we find ourselves is desperately in need of re-formation. Our ears cannot be stopped, our eyes cannot be closed. Particularly not your ears and eyes, nor mine. For you and I represent the body of Jesus Christ. We are His feet and hands in the world, His heart, His mind, His voice, His eyes, His ears. We are the bearers of His word of comfort, heralds of the coming of His kingdom of peace.

But we are more than heralds. We are agents. We do the work of Him who in turn did the work of His Father. We heal and we liberate. We struggle for shalom in all dimensions of human existence, realizing indeed that our efforts will not bring about the kingdom in its fullness, but knowing also that the kingdom will not come about without our efforts. We cannot let society go its own way, when the way it is going is so far from the Way of the Lord.

But what does this have to do with the Christian college? A great deal. The most fundamental thing to say about the Christian college is that it is an arm of the body of Christ in the world. It is of and by and for the church. It exists to equip members of the people of God for their life *as* members of that people—a people which exists not for its own

sake but for the sake of all humanity and thereby to the glory of God. So I am led by iron chains of argument to conclude that the Christian college cannot neglect the suffering of humanity. True, it cannot neglect the suffering produced by alienation from God, and it cannot neglect the suffering produced by the natural world. But also it cannot neglect the suffering produced by the social world. It cannot burrow into culture while neglecting society.¹³

Because the notion that transformation is indeed *the* Reformed approach to culture and society is very popular today, some reflection is needed on this idea. Let me initially simply raise some issues that require more attention than I am going to provide here.¹⁴ First of all an exegetical point. When the kingdom of God is viewed in transformational terms its biblical content becomes distorted. The kingdom of God then becomes an entity which man builds on earth. This notion of the kingdom of God is completely foreign to the Scriptures—nowhere does the Bible speak of the kingdom of God as a human achievement. The kingdom of God is God's rule which He and He alone establishes. Man is to be obedient to the King but he in no way creates God's kingdom.

In this connection the use of the term "transformation" and related ideas by thinkers today ought to give us some pause. Words, too, are known by the company they keep; the fact that the word "transformation" and the idea it represents have been the favorite of radical social-revolutionaries from Marx to the Heinz 57 variety of liberationists today ought to make one think twice before using it. It is Karl Marx after all, not Abraham Kuyper or John Calvin, who is responsible for the much-loved and oft-quoted remark that philosophers used to interpret or describe the world but now they must change or transform it. I am not naively suggesting that merely because Marx says something Christians must automatically reject it. At the same time, pro-

ponents of transformation would be naive if they ignored the way in which the idea of transformation has functioned among radicals who seek nothing less than the revolutionary reconstruction of human society. The term and the idea are hardly neutral; they are weighed down with immense ideological baggage. It may be useful to explore briefly the immediate antecedents of this term as it has been and is currently being used by Reformed thinkers in the area of education. I will take my examples from Professor Beversluis' paper, "In Their Father's House," prepared for the Christian Schools International Task Force on the Future of Christian Education and referred to earlier in this chapter.¹⁵

Christian education in general is the primary arena where the age-old Christ/culture question is fought out. Many readers will be familiar with H. Richard Niebuhr's famous typology of Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ beside culture (or Christ and culture in paradox) and Christ transforms culture.¹⁶ Whatever the merits of Niebuhr's typology, Professor Beversluis has followed the lead of a number of thinkers in clearly and somewhat uncritically accepting the fifth Niebuhr type (Christ transforms culture) as his own and as representing the Reformed tradition. Note the following statements: "One of its (a CSI school) leading ideas is that cultural *affirmation* and *transformation* are the Christian way in the world"; "In guiding young persons in that two-fold response of *affirmation* and *transformation*, the school teaches them that neither fearing nor worshipping culture, but cultural obedience to Jesus Christ is the Christian way"; the goal of the curriculum is that students "begin to understand what the *transformation* of culture in loyalty to Jesus Christ means."

Not only has Professor Beversluis accepted Niebuhr's fifth type (Christ transforms culture) but there are hints that he also adopts Niebuhr's statement of the Christ/culture problem. Niebuhr's five types can

all be placed on a continuum from extreme negation or alienation with respect to culture (Christ against culture, Anabaptism) to radical affirmation or accommodation to culture (Christ of culture, liberalism). In between these two extremes are the three middle groups where Christ and culture are held in some kind of a tension (either above, beside, or transforming). It may be helpful to represent this continuum graphically:

Christ against culture	Christ above, beside or transforms culture	Christ of culture
Negation/ Alienation	Tension between Negation/ Accommodation	Affirmation/ Accommodation
Anabaptists	Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists	Liberals

Professor Beversluis on several occasions takes pains to point out that neither simple negation nor simple affirmation are valid approaches to the Christ/culture problem.

The school teaches young persons that just as withdrawal from cultural concern in a kind of other worldly pietism is wrong, an acceptance of any and all cultural activity and products in a carefree accommodation is wrong. It teaches them that within the domain of culture they must live as *Christians*, that is, in no other way than in life for God and for His image-bearers. It is especially for leadership in such discriminating cultural obedience that homes and churches look to the school.

Critique of Transformationalism

As it stands, of course, the perspective Professor Beversluis puts forth is commendable, especially the emphasis upon "discriminating cultural obedience." The

problem, however, is that the basic framework of a cultural alienation—accommodation continuum cannot deal adequately with a biblical perspective on the Christian's life in the world. The assumption of this framework is that cultural activity as such is a given, a constant, and the question Christians must ask is: How do we relate to this given of culture? It seems to me, however, that we need to ask more fundamental questions such as: How do Christians judge any given culture? What is the source of and how do we know *normatively* the proper, valid structures of culture and society? How do we deal with culture that is deformed? How do we assess the character and extent of cultural deformation? What about the doctrine of creation and creational normativity? Where does human culture now fit in the unfolding drama of the kingdom of God as it is portrayed in Scripture? Does the fact that we live in the age of the New Testament, the "last days," affect our understanding of the Christian's attitude to culture and the cultural mandate? Where does the missionary mandate of Matthew 28 fit into the discussion of Christian education? Is it at all relevant for education, or must the education enterprise be shaped by the cultural mandate alone? The relation of the missionary command to the cultural mandate gives rise to further questions. Which, if either, has the priority? Does the New Testament allow us to continue to say that our primary Christian task today is the fulfillment of the cultural mandate? Is it our task to *transform* the world or are we simply to be witnesses, sign posts to the coming kingdom of God? Is that a fair dilemma? What does it mean for Christian education as a *cultural* activity that the New Testament's basic understanding of Christian existence in the last days is the idea of pilgrimage (or sojourning), that we are pilgrims (or sojourners) whose citizenship is not on earth but in heaven?

The basic framework of a cultural affirmation/alienation continuum is quite inadequate to deal with the broad creational, salvation-historical and even

eschatological issues raised above. The idea of transformation cannot, without significant qualification, serve as the major ground and comprehensive goal for a Reformed Christian educational philosophy. Transformation in itself simply suggests that human culture and society is open-ended and totally malleable to human activity. It supports the enlightenment notion that men and women can create the society of their own dreams and desires, a society which does not need to be judged by external criteria such as God's law. Education exists simply to provide the requisite tools for such transformation and change. While it is true that Reformed thinkers such as Beversluis and Wolterstorff who use transformation language and imagery seek nothing less than full obedience to God's purposes for human culture and society, their use of this conceptual framework is less than satisfactory. While it is undeniable that *one* of the important tasks facing Christian education today is to alert students to the brokenness of the world and the need to be ambassadors of reconciliation and shalom, Reformed Christians should have serious reservations about using the concept of transformation as the basic and comprehensive framework for describing the task of Christian schools. Perhaps this will become more clear when an alternative conceptual framework for understanding the task and goal of Christian education is set forth, namely the doctrine of the trinity.

A Trinitarian Framework for Christian Education

Since a rather full trinitarian framework has already been sketched in the previous four chapters of this book, it is not necessary to duplicate that material here. My proposal is that the human (and Christian!) socio-cultural project and its application to the question of Christian day school education is best understood within the context of the works of the triune God in human history. We recall that the Heidelberg Catechism

(in Lord's Day 8) provides us with a useful division of God's acts as they are confessed in the Apostle's Creed. These articles are divided according to the Catechism into three parts dealing with God the Father and our creation, God the Son and our deliverance, God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. This division, which must not be made absolute "in the sense that God the Son and Holy Spirit are absent" from creation or that God the Father is absent in the work of deliverance and sanctification, nevertheless gives us a useful *theological* (as opposed to Niebuhr's *sociological* typology) tool for understanding how different Christians understand their task in the world. To oversimplify a bit: Christians who emphasize the first article (creation) will stress affirmation of creation and culture; Christians who emphasize the second article (deliverance) will stress missions; and Christians who emphasize the third article (sanctification) will stress the holiness of living and separation as the key to a Christian lifestyle. These choices also clearly and identifiably affect the character of Christian day school education offered by these respective Christian groups.

It is of course easy to say, and much harder to implement in concrete fashion, that a proper Christian approach to life in the world and thus to Christian education must be fully trinitarian and must include the cultural mandate, the missionary mandate, and the call to holiness. The approach that has been referred to as the "transformational" approach represents a particular blend of first and third article Christianity. On the one hand it affirms creation, culture and society, but on the other it also adopts a posture of constant negation or criticism of the same. Ongoing transformation, change, even revolution is the goal. It is true that in a sinful world where there exists much socio-cultural deformation and unrighteousness, Christians must be reminded of their obligations to be ambassadors of shalom and peace in their personal and communal lives. While the term "reformation" (which suggests a crea-

tion normativity rather than an ambiguous, normless, open-ended future) is preferable to "transformation," it must be granted and clearly affirmed that schools do have an important responsibility to remind their students of their calling to be witnesses to shalom and to warn them against cheap withdrawal from the world or easy accommodation to it. But schools also have an obligation to uncover creation's laws (God's wisdom) for society and culture and to point out the shape of Christian socio-cultural *obedience* quite apart from whether such obedience transforms culture and society. Socio-cultural obedience, living by God's laws, may on occasion mean active *withdrawal* from particular socio-cultural activities. Cultivating socio-cultural obedience, which may or may not bring shalom to the world, since obedience may bring persecution and opposition as well as transformation, is a more accurate way of describing the school's task. Such socio-cultural obedience must include within it space for the mission or evangelistic task of the Christian community as well as the responsibility to develop personal godliness and holiness (true piety) in students.¹⁷ It is here that the inadequacy of the transformational ideal becomes evident.

One of the net effects of transformational imagery is that it tends to blur the boundary between church and school and between the cultural and missionary tasks of Christians. Both merge into the one global perspective of transformation or liberation which then summarizes the task and goal of church and school alike. Where this blurring becomes evident is the application of the word "redeem" to human cultural activity. A report on dancing to the 1982 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, for example, speaks in transformational categories of "redeeming the dance." While the Report's general recommendations are unobjectionable (i.e. that dancing is a valid part of Christian cultural obedience and can be God-glorifying) the language of "redeeming" the dance mixes missionary, soteriological categories with creation, cultural ones in a confusing

way. The Bible teaches that *persons* are redeemed but not cultural activities such as dancing or even socio-political structures such as labor unions or business. The language of “redeeming” (i.e. transforming) society or culture blurs the necessary distinction between the evangelistic missionary mandate of the church and the socio-cultural responsibility of Christians in other areas of life such as education. My reservations about using the categories of transformation as a comprehensive framework for a philosophy of Christian education are thus really twofold: the term is not wisely chosen because of its unfortunate ideological connotations, and even when it is properly qualified to suggest a proper Christian *reformation* of culture and society in accordance with God’s laws, it too narrowly limits the scope of education. One valid emphasis becomes the whole program.

A trinitarian framework for understanding the task and goal of Christian day school education meets the concerns and avoids the pitfalls of the three alternative proposals discussed at some length in this chapter. The reason for that is simple. The human mind naturally strives for unity and thus seeks a conceptual unity by which human activities can be understood. Theologians and Christian philosophers, too, have attempted to formulate a key concept or doctrine which can serve as a touchstone and from which all other ideas, concepts, and tasks can be derived. Hence the attempt to build a comprehensive theology or philosophy on “the sovereignty of God,” “the kingdom of God,” “the covenant,” “the law-gospel dialectic,” “justification,” or “nature and grace,” to mention but a few of the more preferred candidates. Such attempts usually fail in the final analysis, I am convinced, because unity is ultimately found in the triune God alone.

What does the trinitarian framework proposed here mean concretely for Reformed Christian education? Reformed theology, it has been shown in the first two chapters of this book, begins with God the Father and

creation and the *cultural* calling of man given in Genesis 1:28 (“Be fruitful, have dominion”). Sin’s entrance into the world did not abrogate this calling but brought forth, in the fullness of time after our Lord’s finished work, a new mandate or calling, the *missionary* or evangelistic mandate of Matthew 28 (“Go into all the world . . .”). In chapter four it was argued that this latter mandate must qualify the former because we live in a sinful world, in the “last days.” However, both mandates are before us. In our differentiated society today, while the missionary task is and remains the responsibility of each believer (we are all witnesses), it is the *qualifying* or *distinguishing* characteristic of the church and its educational ministry. It is the church’s task to call men to and sustain them in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel of forgiveness and press the demands of Christian discipleship. It is the school’s primary responsibility to equip students for *socio-cultural obedience* to the triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. This particular trinitarian formulation is deliberate because Christian education in the school must promote cultural obedience in *our* time, the last days, the age of the Holy Spirit. Christian day school education is also a post-Pentecost phenomenon. It simply will not do to say, as some Reformed Christians do, that Christian day schools deal with creation while the church is concerned about redemption. A Christian’s life in the creation, in human culture today, cannot be divorced from a personal commitment to Christ and a life of holy discipleship. The school, too, must seek to develop Christian piety and a sound devotional life among its students. The Christian school must, in the power of the Spirit, guide its students toward spiritual discernment.

Joy in Learning

This trinitarian framework has some very practical implications for Christian day schools. To begin with it

should be noted that joy must be a hallmark of good Christian education. Joy is necessary because God created the world to enjoy it. When we ask the question of why God created the world, we can only answer: because of His good pleasure. God saw what He had made and rejoiced in its goodness. The Book of Proverbs (8:30-31) notes that God's wisdom, by which He created all things "was daily His delight rejoicing before Him always, rejoicing in His inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men." Creation is rooted in God's free good pleasure and serves His and man's joy. Joy is also a key characteristic of the new heaven and the new earth as Isaiah (65:17-19) describes it: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing city and her people a joy; I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people."

This citation from Isaiah is very important because it underscores the need for a trinitarian framework in which the Holy Spirit and eschatology are every bit as *educationally* significant as the Father, creation and culture. If it is true that life in the creation and culture is to be characterized by joy, then a school cannot cultivate joy in its students by merely cultivating the enjoyment of creation and culture. Not in *our* day at least. Our educational systems and institutions today have material, creational and cultural advantages as never before, and make them virtually universally accessible. Yet the "products" of our society's schools seem depressingly joyless. Why? Because in *our* age (the age of the Spirit, the last days), creation and culture in themselves are not enough. With the prospect of nuclear war hanging over our heads, with the growing likelihood of being unable to find employment after graduation, with war, poverty and famine on the increase, delight and joy in creation and culture are very difficult for many young people. Creational and cultural excess are

joined with cynicism and apathy. While Christians should not be naive about or indifferent to real problems in our world, they do have hope and can be joyful. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit; while we cannot make fruit grow, we do create the conditions in which it either flourishes or withers. If schools and teachers are to cultivate true joy in learning, creation and culture cannot stand alone. Joy needs room or permission if it is to flourish. We know that activities which are prohibited or forbidden prevent genuine enjoyment. Guilt intrudes and saps true joy. Christians who grow up with excessive prohibitions against cultural activities such as theater and dance require some form of permission, even if it comes from a rationalized conscience, in order to participate in them freely. Marriage counselors remind us that we need permission to enjoy our sexuality. For the Christian, joy is rooted in the fact that God the Creator delights in the world He fashioned and that we are thus permitted, given the freedom by Him, to enjoy it. "For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (I Timothy 4:4-5). Joy is possible only when we affirm and say "Amen" to God's creation.

Yet it is precisely here that we encounter the objection briefly considered a moment ago. Christians, reflecting upon the state of our world, could object: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" or as a Negro spiritual has it, "How can I play when I'm in a strange land?" Would a real Tevye in a real Russia not sing Psalm 137, weeping by the rivers of Babylon, rather than the light, dancing, joyful strains of "If I Were a Rich Man"? Is it not in bad taste to enjoy dessert when millions are starving? Can we be joyful before we overcome world poverty and malnutrition?

It is indeed true that in a sinful, broken world, joy needs love. We have no right to talk about joy or enjoyment if in our creational affluence and cultural abundance we are indifferent to the plight of the needy and

oppressed. We may not abuse joy by making it captive to an ideology which uncritically allows exploitation to continue in the name of enjoying the creation. Joy without love is empty and self-deceiving. However, love and concern without joy is moralism; we do need permission to enjoy God's gifts without guilt. This is our Father's world, and we may find joy as well as rest in that truth. The certainty which arises out of Christian hope makes our joy in creation and culture possible today. This brings us to another dimension of joy.

One of the remarkable affirmations of the New Testament is that Christians who follow their Lord are to find joy in suffering (the cross). Peter tells us (I Peter 4:12) that we are to rejoice when we share the sufferings of Christ. James (1:2) notes: "Consider yourselves happy indeed my brethren, when you encounter trials of every sort." "Blessed (happy) are the mourners." The journey that leads to joy must travel through the valley of sorrow. In the sixteenth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus reminds His disciples that they will be sorrowful, but that their sorrow will turn into joy that cannot be taken away from them.

Two things flow from this: 1) The suffering and sorrows of this present age are not eternal and are not worth comparing with the glory that shall be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). We find joy in assurance of the final triumph of God's kingdom. 2) There is joy in our present life not through avoidance of suffering but *in* it. It is the paradox of the Christian experience that joy is found *in* the cross and in cross-bearing. The apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

Learning which cultivates and promotes joy, in other words, must be seen in a trinitarian perspective. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creation, cross and hope are inseparable also in education. Only that education which begins by acknowledging God's joy (pleasure, glory) as the foundation and goal of reality can truly have joy in learning. It is the task of the Christian school

and the Christian teacher to assist students in the joy of discovering that this world is God's world. This means concretely that teachers must delight (take joy in) their subject matter and radiate the joy of the Lord in their own walk of life. Not only knowledge of subject matter but joy in it and enthusiasm for it are essential. It also means that we must not consider subjects whose primary purpose is to cultivate delight (art, music, literature) as secondary luxuries but every bit as crucial as writing, arithmetic and computer science. Christian schools may, in the next few years, especially in the face of a sluggish economy, face a real temptation to go the way of the "world" and to focus programs and curricula on "useful" courses, i.e. those that give students employable, marketable skills. In the crunch, the art, drama, and music courses and teachers might be the first ones considered expendable. This would be a serious mistake. Christian schools must not be tyrannized by what the world considers *economically* useful, at least not if there is to be joy in our learning. Christian students need to learn that there is a life-long joy in studying the humanities that cannot be measured by "how much will it pay me?" On this score too, Christians must resist that spirit of our age.

The joy that comes with the cross also requires of Christian education that it cultivates a spirit of caring and compassion for a suffering world, a care that is directed toward the world beyond our affluent West but also to the suffering within Christian schools. The slow learner comes to mind here. Christians must not apologize for striving for academic excellence in their schools. But a Christian school must not become elitist. If it lacks the compassion for those who find learning more difficult, if it is unable to rejoice with their accomplishments then Christian education has lost its soul. For this reason competition in Christian schools should be focused less on *external* competition between students and more on the *internal* competition that the student experiences with his or her own personal

mastery of a subject or activity.

Finally, joy dies without hope. What does it profit Christian day school education if it gains the whole world of culture and loses hope? If the students who graduate from Christian educational institutions lack the joy and confidence that comes from the certainty that the triune God is also in charge of history and will bring it to a glorious conclusion, the educational process has in large measure failed. Christian schools and teachers have an obligation to counter the gloom and despair of our age with the hope of the gospel or else their basic task in cultivating Christian socio-cultural obedience collapses.

The Christian School and Evangelism

This excursus on joy in learning has been instructive because it so clearly illustrates that Christian day school education also must be seen in a trinitarian framework. To focus on creation and culture is not enough. The same conclusion must be drawn when we consider the responsibility of the school for the mission mandate. The school cannot leave the mission mandate to the church alone. Not in *our* day. Not only do teachers when teaching subjects such as geography and history have an obligation to point out the importance of Christian missionary activity, but the schools must themselves serve in a mission capacity. Students who pass through Christian schools ought to be confronted with the call to Christian commitment. Furthermore, if schools in mission situations on foreign soils can be utilized to serve in an evangelizing capacity there should be no principled reason why they could not do the same in North America. I recognize that using the school in an evangelistic way brings with it additional difficulties, and I reiterate that evangelism as such is not the *raison d'être* of Christian day schools. However, there are good reasons for at least including explicit missionary goals as a valid *part* of the school's overall task. Such

evangelizing must of course be completely open and above board. No parents should be encouraged to send children to a Christian school under false pretenses. A sincere desire on the part of parents to have children instructed in Christian discipleship is essential. Furthermore, the evangelistic task of the school cannot be accomplished successfully without the involvement of the church. A Christian school, however, ignores its evangelistic responsibilities at the peril of losing its Christian identity.

Spirituality and Holiness in Christian Education

Finally, a trinitarian perspective suggests that the work of the Holy Spirit demands further attention and reflection by the Reformed community which supports Christian day school education. Specifically, spirituality, piety, godliness, and holiness of lifestyle are all valid dimensions of the school's task as well. Undoubtedly much of this is cultivated by godly, spiritual, holy teachers who model Christian virtues, rather than by the curriculum. A keen sensitivity and ability to be spiritually discerning are therefore as necessary for Christian school teachers as is good academic and professional training. No one ought to disparage or underestimate the value of personal godliness and holiness as a goal in Christian education. A Christian education which purports to have the role and visionary aim of claiming the whole world for Christ's kingdom, of transforming socio-political structures, and fails to cultivate in its students the most elementary and basic Christian virtues and practices is a failure. Arguing that Christian schools exist to prepare students for committed, Christian leavening discipleship in business, civic and socio-political life sounds hollow when students in Christian schools are disrespectful, abusive, rude, pushy, boorish, uncompassionate, cliquish, unkind to the weak and different, when they use foul language and even on occasion abuse alcohol and drugs. Christian

education cannot do much about the sanctification of society when there remains so much personal holiness missing in Christians' lives.

This may mean that spiritually discerning Christians decide to separate themselves from certain cultural activities or products. This separation does not rise out of an isolationist mentality but because certain practices are no longer under proper Christian influence or control. For example, when alcohol abuse reaches certain levels in the Christian community or in society at large, Christians might decide to become total abstainers, not because they judge moderate use of spirits to be evil in itself, but because the situation is out of control. What is true of alcohol may also be true of certain cultural expressions such as theater or dance or even of certain political activities. The early Christian church, for example, proscribed Christian involvement in the Imperial Army because it involved Caesar worship. Similar strategic abstention is *not* to be ruled out in our day.

Perhaps the concerns being raised here can be summarized by suggesting that *humility* and *service* rather than *pride* and *success* ought to be important goals for Christian education. These two categories (humility and service as opposed to pride and success) are chosen because they underscore the dilemma in which *Christian* education finds itself. Humility seems such a strange goal for education. After all, education is about striving, competence, accomplishment. Education is preparation for success. We judge the success or failure of education, also Christian education, by the *success* of its students. If students succeed, their education has been good; if they fail, their education has been bad. What possible role can humility have in all of this, and what is meant here by humility? A useful definition of humility comes from an excellent book by Robert C. Roberts entitled *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (heartily recommended for all parents and teachers). Roberts suggests that humility is essentially "a matter of viewing everyone as ultimately or basically equal":

Humility is the disposition gladly to construe as my equal every person who is presented to me. It is the disposition not to be touched in my self-esteem by the fact that someone is clearly ahead of me in the games of the world nor to find any satisfaction in noting that I am ahead of someone in those games. It is the ability to have my self-esteem quite apart from any question about my place in the social pecking order (whether the criterion is accomplishments, education, beauty, money, power, fame, or position); it is the loss of my spiritually cannibalistic appetite. Humility is thus a deep self-confidence, running far deeper than the tenuous self-confidence of the person who believes in himself because there are others who look up to him.

If this is humility, two things follow. First, if adults are to cultivate it, we need some way of conceiving of ourselves and our neighbors jointly, by which they will appear to us as equals. If we have no other way of "seeing" our neighbors than in terms of the competitive games the world plays, we have little hope of becoming humble. Our inclination to succumb to invidious comparisons is so great and the means of making these comparisons are so readily available that a necessary part of our defense against spiritual cannibalism will be an equally clear conceptualization of our neighbor as our equal. And second, we need some basis of self-esteem other than our success in competition with others. We cannot escape the need to believe ourselves valuable, nor would we want to lose that capacity if we could. To believe ourselves worthless is a terrible and unchristian thing; and not to care that we are worthless is perhaps more woeful still.¹⁸

Humility is thus rooted in the conviction that all men and women are created in the image of God. Humility is the heart of true spirituality in its practical dimension (*holiness*). As Calvin puts it:

But I say: we ought to embrace the whole human race without exception in a single feeling of love; here there is no distinction between barbarian and Greek, worthy and unworthy, friend and enemy, since all should be contemplated in God, not in themselves. When we turn aside from such contemplation, it is no wonder we become entangled in many errors. Therefore, if we rightly direct our love, we must first turn our eyes not to man, the sight of whom would more often engender hate than love, but to God, who bids us extend to all men the love we bear to him, that this may be an unchanging principle: whatever the character of the man, we must yet love him because we love God.¹⁹

Understood in this way, lack of humility is a fundamental spiritual vice.

It is not difficult to feel why people who lack humility are spiritually bankrupt. Their capacity for human relationships—the spiritual ones which are the most important of their lives—is poisoned by the tendency to climb to eminence at someone else's expense. The proud person is one who needs to have somebody who compares disadvantageously with himself before he will feel good about himself. He says to himself, "I may be stupid and ugly, but all is not lost; compared to a guy I know in Mrs. Foster's rooming house, I'm a combination of Albert Einstein and Robert Redford." Or perhaps he says, "I am the greatest." But in either case it is the comparison that builds the self, so there is always another person, somewhere in the background at least, who is supporting the weight of my ego with the suffering of his failure to make the grade relative to me.²⁰

When "success" and "service," "pride" and "humility" are suggested as polar opposites, we are speaking of "success" and "pride" as "worldly" ends in themselves, as the pursuit of advantage over someone else, at someone else's expense, not of legitimate

satisfaction in one's honest accomplishments. Once again Roberts:

I want to suggest that the opposite of humility as a virtue is not self-confidence, initiative, assertiveness, and self-esteem, but instead pushiness, scorn of "inferiors," rejoicing in the downfall of others, envy, resentment and grudge bearing, ruthless ambition, haughtiness, shame at failure or disadvantageous comparison, and the need to excel others to think well of oneself. Humility is the ability, without prejudice to one's self-esteem, to admit one's inferiority, in this or that respect, to another. And it is the ability, without encroachment to one's self-esteem or prejudice to the quality of one's relationship with another, to remark one's superiority, in this or that respect, to another. As such, humility is a psychological principle of independence from others and a necessary ground of genuine fellowship with them, an emotional independence of one's judgments concerning how one ranks vis-a-vis other human beings.

This vision, when appropriated, is also the ultimate ground of self-confidence. For the message is that God loves me for myself—not for anything I have achieved, not for my beauty or intelligence or righteousness or for any other "qualification" but simply in the way that a good mother loves the fruit of her womb. If I can get *that* into my head—or better, into my heart—then I won't be grasping desperately for self-esteem at the expense of others, and cutting myself off from my proper destiny, which is spiritual fellowship with them.²¹

The reader should by now sense what is meant here by "spirituality" and its expression in personal holiness. It is not simply that teachers and students in Christian schools should sing more psalms, read more Bible stories and pray more (although maybe they should do that too) and then our children will be nicer. Rather it is

this: Christian schools cannot avoid asking the question of how to make children and young people “fit” for the kingdom of God. Do the curricula, the way grading takes place, the way students compete in athletics, the attitudes communicated by teachers, parental pressure and expectation—do all of these foster the kind of spirituality (humility) briefly outlined above or do they militate against it? When parents and teachers and boards address the concerns about student conduct and lack of personal holiness, are they aware of their own contribution to it? Specifically, the following should be discussed by supporters of Christian education: How do Christian schools deal with the slow learner? Do they exclude certain children (especially in the lower grades) from public activities such as choirs because looking “good” is the most important thing? Do they place the accent on winning or participation in school athletic activities? Do teachers use sarcasm and other means for “putting down” children who may be disagreeable to them? When courses in social studies, geography, and science are taught, are students taught sensitive ecological and human concerns as well as mastery of the creation? Are Christian schools constantly looking at the public schools to see what constitutes worldly success and worldly status? Do Christian schools actively promote compassion and understanding? The school is after all a moral community as well as a learning community. Professor Wolterstorff puts it very nicely when he says:

Thus in order to teach morality, the school must itself be a moral community. More generally, to teach the Christian way of life, the school must itself exhibit that way of life. It must be a community of peace, *shalom*, love. Of course, the desire to teach what it aims to teach is not the only reason for the school to seek to be a community of love. The Christian school is the body of Christ coming to expression in a certain locale, there and then. Moral action is important for the present,

not just the future, for life in that classroom, not just for others. The joy and peace in human relations which moral action brings should be present in each classroom—for its inherent worth, not just for its instructional benefits.²²

The school cannot avoid the matter of personal, spiritual and moral growth. It either promotes it or hinders it. Above all, the role modelling of teachers is crucial. Deeply spiritually sensitive teachers are essential to the development of spiritually and morally mature students. In this respect a word of caution is in order. While the school may not (in fact *can* not) leave the spiritual and moral development of students to the home, it cannot nurture such growth apart from the home or the church. Furthermore, children and adolescents too are free, responsible, moral and spiritual agents who cannot be *forced* to believe or even to *behave* perfectly. The building of spiritual and moral character is a valid and necessary goal of all Christian education. There are, however, no guarantees, only the very real promises of God, hope and faith. But that is more than enough.

The perspective on Reformed Christian education sketched in this chapter roots Christian education in a comprehensive vision of the sovereign kingship of the triune God who is Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. This sovereign rule and man's response in loving obedience is the motivation and basis for Christian education. This vision incorporates the covenant responsibility of the Christian and seeks active reformation of a sin-deformed society without one-sidedly forcing education into a narrow, exclusive covenantal or all-embracing transformational mold. Christian education, too, is a matter of discipleship, of service to the triune God.

A brief concluding postscript to this chapter. The trinitarian perspective sketched here provides a broad framework for understanding the purpose, content and goal of Christian education. That is, however, only a

beginning; several tasks remain to be done. Further work needs to be done in the area of practical pedagogy and curriculum development. As an intermediate step, it is also crucial for Christian education that Reformed Christians work at developing a comprehensive Christian, social philosophy. While the Reformed community is blessed with a rich, socio-culturally reflective tradition, much work needs to be done in coming to terms with and applying that tradition to the crises of our day.

Notes

1. Cited by I. Van Dellen and M. Monsma in *The Revised Church Order Commentary: An Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 272.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *The Banner*, September 29, 1980, p. 12.
5. "Toward a Theology of Education," *Occasional Papers from Calvin College*, Vol. I, No. 1 (February, 1981), pp. 21, 22.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
7. *Ibid.*
8. I have on several occasions in this chapter used terms such as "principle," "idea," and now "symbol" to refer to the realities of the covenant, the kingdom of God and even the Trinity. I am not suggesting by this usage that these are *mere* ideas or symbols. On the contrary! I affirm covenant, kingdom and Trinity as *realities*. What needs to be noted however is that these *realities* do serve as *principles, ideas, or symbols* when they are used in a *theoretical* manner to provide theological bases for certain affirmations about education. When the covenant or the kingdom or even the Trinity is used in this manner as an idea or principle, it must never be forgotten that the *idea* is rooted in a *reality*. A careful reading of this chapter should make it clear that even when I am using an idea in a *theoretical* way I am affirming the *reality* to which it points.
9. The entire creed can be found in E.L.H. Taylor, *A Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1966), pp. 648-49.
10. Appendix A in John Vriend *et. al.* *To Prod the Slumbering Giant* (Toronto: Wedge, 1972), p. 170.
11. *In Their Father's House*. Unpublished document prepared for the C.S.I. Task Force on the Future of Christian Education, p. 8.
12. The person who has articulated this vision most clearly, consistently and comprehensively has been Calvin College philosophy professor Nicholas Wolterstorff. See his *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) and *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). A succinct version of Wolterstorff's vision can be found

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in his 1982 Wheaton College convocation address, "The Mission of the Christian College at the end of the twentieth century," *The Reformed Journal*, Vol. XXXII (June 1983), 14-18.

13. "Missions of the Christian College," p. 17.

14. It is my intention in the hopefully not-too-distant future to address, in a more substantial way, the question of whether transformation is *the* Reformed approach to culture and society. For the present these rather brief preliminary remarks must suffice.

15. See note 11. The cited references which follow can be found on pages 4, 18, 24, and 17 of the report respectively. The emphases are Professor Beversluis'.

16. *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

17. What I do appreciate in all of Professor Beversluis' writings about Christian education is his insistence that both *piety* and *culture* are necessary ingredients in a proper, Reformed Christian education. My differences with him on this matter are not so much a matter of content as framework. As I have indicated in this chapter, I also have reservations about his use of transformationalism as *the* Reformed approach to society.

18. *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 61, 67-68.

19. *Institutes*, II.vii.56.

20. *Spirituality and Human Emotion*, p. 65.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 69.

22. *Educating for Responsible Action*, p. 111.

7.

Creation and Cross: The Tension in Reformed Ethics

It is a time-honored pedagogical device to establish one's own opinion or view by drawing a sharp contrast between oneself and an opposing viewpoint. I have used that technique on several occasions in this volume not only to set forth what is a distinctively Reformed Christian stance over against Roman Catholic or Lutheran Christianity but also to define my own position in contrast with other Reformed thinkers. Accenting differences highlights distinctiveness. In this chapter I wish to call attention to an important tension in Reformed ethics by contrasting it with Anabaptist ethics. This contrast is important because the Anabaptist ethical vision as it is represented by men such as John H. Yoder, William Stringfellow, Jim Wallis and publications such as *Sojourners* magazine is becoming increasingly influential, also among many Reformed Christians.

The Conflict with Anabaptist Ethics

When it comes to differences, even divisions, between Protestant Christian communities, there is perhaps none that runs so deep as the one between the Reformed tradition and the radical Anabaptist tradition. While

Lord's Day 18 of the Heidelberg Catechism reflects a polemic against the Lutheran understanding of Jesus' ascension, and the Canons of Dort reject Arminian (and Pelagian) heresy with vim and vigor, the Classic Reformed confessions single out "the Anabaptists and other seditious people" for "detesting." Only the Roman Catholic Church and its "accursed idolatry," the mass, are treated with this kind of intensity in the confessions as well as in Calvin's *Institutes*.

The reason for this is worth noting. It is not so much a matter of doctrine that is at issue (although the Belgic Confession in article XXXIV does call Reformed Christians to "detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received, and moreover condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who we believe ought to be baptized") but rather the Reformers' concern that Anabaptists subvert the civil and social order. Anabaptists are to be detested, according to the Belgic Confession because they "reject higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God has established among men" (Article XXXVI). It is thus not surprising that when what might be called Anabaptist thought and practice or lifestyle is introduced and advocated within the Reformed community, it produces a sharp and oft-times bitter reaction. When Reformed Christians advocate shared, communal and simple lifestyle, radical social and economic egalitarianism, civil disobedience, nuclear or other pacifism, the fur flies—and it has in the Reformed community. Debates rage, pro and con, about the Catholic Bishops' statements on the economy and nuclear weapons (which sound more Anabaptist than Catholic), the Ghandi movie, testing cruise missiles in Canada, whether "small is beautiful," or whether Christians should favor continued industrial and economic growth. The advocates of such "Anabaptist" tendencies are shocked and offended by the often violent reaction to what they con-

sider to be a radical and consistent obedience to Christ. Their vigorous opponents are equally shocked and offended by what they consider to be a sell-out of the Reformed world-and-life view. At stake is a significantly different perspective on what it means to be a Christian in the world, or if you will, a fundamentally different basis for Christian ethics.

This difference can be conveniently summarized as a conflict between a perspective rooted in creation and one rooted in the cross. Anabaptist Christianity is a Christianity of the cross; Jesus the crucified is our ethical example. As John H. Yoder puts it in his influential *The Politics of Jesus*: "Only at one point, only on one subject—but then consistently, universally—is Jesus our example: in His cross."¹ For Yoder the cross of Jesus takes on social and political dimensions as well as the more narrowly personal ones.

There is thus but one realm in which the concept of imitation holds—but there it holds in every strand of the New Testament literature and all the more strikingly by virtue of the absence of parallels in other realms: this is at the point of the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power. Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility. Thus—and only thus—are we bound by New Testament thought to "be like Jesus."²

The cross is thus a symbol of social and political non-conformity; it represents sacrifice, servanthood, suffering, powerlessness and what Yoder calls revolutionary subordination. The Christian lives by the power of the cross to overthrow power and the powers that be. The result is a Christian walk of life which is characterized by sacrificial world-renunciation and self-conscious powerlessness. The Christian represents in the social and political realm, "in an unwilling world, the order to come."³

The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, in its ethics places the emphasis upon creation and the law

rather than upon the cross. Not the imitation of Christ, not the Sermon on the Mount, but the decalogue forms the basis of Reformed ethics. The Reformed understanding of the Christian life is world-affirming and includes an appreciation of human culture as God's gift. The language of sacrifice, simplicity, powerlessness, renunciation, is balanced by an emphasis upon enjoyment, affirmation, and the *lawful* exercise of dominion or power. This affirmation of creation and culture must be done "for the glory of God," and it is for this reason that the law of God which reveals God's will given in creation is so important in Reformed ethics.

It is the law, the decalogue, that dominates, for example, the Dutch Reformed neo-Calvinist ethicist Wilhelm Geesink's two major works, *Gereformeerde Ethiek* and *Van 's Heeren Ordinantien*.⁴ It is also the doctrine of creation (and law) that led the Dutch Reformed thinker Abraham Kuyper to affirm his ambitious program of *Christian* cultural and political activity. For Kuyper human culture was relatively independent of the *redemptive* work of Jesus Christ. Kuyper's twin fears of Roman Catholic ecclesiasticism (the domination of human culture by the institutional church as in the Middle Ages) and Anabaptist world-flight (forsaking the world for Jesus' sake) led him to insist that human culture is rooted in creation and is a product of God's common or preserving grace rather than His special or redeeming grace. Human cultural activity in general and even specific ethical demands such as neighbor-love are not, in Kuyper's judgment, the product of specifically Christian redemptive-revelatory insight but are a given of the general human condition as created by God. Not the cross but God's law, therefore, given in creation and revealed in the decalogue, is the foundation for Christian cultural-ethical reflection. Not the *cross* but insight into creation and its laws guides our life in marriage, family, business and the state.

The Imitation of Christ in the Reformed Tradition

For the purpose of contrast the problem has been stated categorically as creation (law) or cross; Reformed thought linked with creation, Anabaptist thought with the cross. In actuality, the matter is not so simple. In Reformed thought too, at least in Calvin himself, the cross and the imitation of Christ do receive considerable attention. Because this emphasis upon the imitation of Christ, self-denial, and cross-bearing as essential ingredients of a *Reformed* understanding of life in the world are relatively unfamiliar to many Reformed people, at least to those who cut their theological eye-teeth on Abraham Kuyper, it is worthwhile to summarize briefly Calvin's understanding of the Christian life as it is portrayed in Book III.vi-x of the *Institutes*, the so-called "Golden Booklet of the Christian Life."

There are basically three dimensions to the Christian life according to Calvin: 1. Self-denial and cross-bearing, 2. Meditation upon the future life, and 3. Use and enjoyment of this present life. In this Christian walk of life, Christ Himself is the example we are called to follow.

Calvin begins his discussion of the Christian life by noting that the goal for believers is conformity "between God's righteousness and their obedience." He then adds:

The law of God contains in itself that newness by which His image can be restored in us. But because our slowness needs many goals and helps, it will be profitable to assemble from various passages of Scripture a pattern for the conduct of life in order that those who heartily repent may not err in their zeal.⁵

And in the next chapter, in a similar vein, Calvin notes:

Even though the law of the Lord provides the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a

man's life, it seemed good to the Heavenly Teacher to shape His people by an even more explicit plan to that rule which He had set forth in the law.⁶

The beginning of this "pattern" of the "more explicit plan" Calvin finds summarized in the words of Romans 12:1 where "the duty of believers is 'to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him.' " The Christian is called to deny self and be ruled by the Spirit of Christ, to put off the old nature and to put on the new. It is in this process of mortification and vivification that Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection is the example and pattern for the believer. In Calvin's words, while it is true that Scripture

enjoins us to refer our life to God, its author, to whom it is bound; (in other words to orient our life to creation, j.b.) but after it has taught that we have degenerated from the true origin and condition of our creation, it also adds that Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life.⁷

Here we have the real reason for the *imitation* of Christ—we live in a sinful world. And here we come to the limits of a creation theology and an ethic based on creation and law. As *sinners* we are incapable of keeping the law and living in the creation as we should apart from the regenerating power of the Spirit. Because they rooted their theology in the Father and creation (not in the Son and redemption), Calvin and the Reformed tradition after him always insisted that life in creation is good, under the blessing of God. When God created man, male and female, He blessed them and gave them a position of rulership in the creation. Thus the Reformed tradition has always insisted (over and against the Anabaptists) that the *legitimate* exercise of power (dominion) in business, politics or church life is not to be rejected in principle but to be affirmed. The good

creation of God and man's dominion in it are to be accepted and enjoyed as gifts of God. Having and raising a family, starting and operating a successful business, running for and obtaining political office are all proper and valid Christian *vocations* in which one can and is called to glorify God.

However, unlike some of his spiritual descendents, Calvin was also acutely aware that we no longer live in the Garden of Eden but in a fallen, sinful world where sin distorts and power corrupts. And it is for that reason that Calvin stresses the need for self-denial and the struggle to put our inner life under the control of the Word and Spirit of God. The law of creation is thus not enough—we must die with Christ, our old self must be crucified. It is the *new* creature, whose old nature has died with Christ, who can truly obey the law.

For Calvin, however, the example of Christ and our need to follow Him goes further. As Calvin scholar Ronald Wallace notes:

God wills that our whole life should be conformed to the death of Christ. This means that we must become conformed in outward circumstances as well as in inward attitude of heart. Therefore to live the Christian life involves us not only in the necessity of inward self-denial but also in many troubles and afflictions from outside ourselves.⁸

The Christian is one who not only patiently accepts God's discipline in the common suffering of mankind but who also, in imitation of Christ and for the sake of Christ's kingdom as well as for his neighbor's good, *voluntarily* suffers or sacrifices by denying himself what may otherwise be rightfully his. While Calvin himself does not reach this specific conclusion, we should note that his emphasis implies, for those of us who live in the affluent sector of a world where God's gifts are inequitably distributed, a willingness to sacrifice that which in itself is legitimate and good.

Calvin seeks to understand the Christian life not

only in terms of the pattern of dying and rising with Christ but also in terms of Christ's ascension.

Calvin insists that we can even now in actual practice not only rise with Christ from the death of sin into a new life, but also ascend with Christ above this world. Christ ascended in order that we might ascend with Him, not only at the last day but even now . . . 'Ascension follows resurrection: hence if we are the members of Christ we must ascend into heaven, because He, on being raised up from the dead was received up into heaven that He might draw us with Him.'⁹

(The citation from Calvin here comes from his commentary on Colossians 3:1, "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God." For Calvin, an essential ingredient of the Christian life is "meditation on the future life" which incidentally is the title of *Institutes*, III.ix.)

According to Calvin, even Adam in Eden did not find the full meaning and purpose of his creation in this present life but "was meant rather to use this life with its opportunities and its glory for meditation for the better and heavenly life which was to be his final destiny."¹⁰ In a sinful world, however, this meditation on the future, heavenly life is accentuated and accompanied by a *contemptio mundi* (a contempt of this world). Calvin puts it this way:

Then only do we rightly advance by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways, and in no respect clearly happy; that all those things which are judged to be its goods are uncertain, fleeting, vain, and vitiated by many intermingled evils. From this, at the same time, we conclude that in this life we are to seek and hope for nothing but struggle; when we think of our crown, we are to raise our eyes to heaven. For this

we must believe; that the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life. Indeed, there is no middle ground between these two: either the world must become worthless to us or hold us bound by intemperate love of it.¹¹

If Calvin can be considered a Calvinist, then Reformed Christians should not be altogether uncomfortable with speaking of “this life as a constant death” (the old Dort baptismal form) or of this world as a vale of tears or of being pilgrims and strangers on earth. It must be remembered, however, that Calvin’s *contemptio mundi* is a consequence of, and is qualified by the reality of sin. Calvin warns: “But let believers accustom themselves to a contempt of the present life that engenders no hatred of it or ungratitude to God.”¹² It is “the *perverse* love of this life” that leads to “the desire for a better one.” For that reason this present earthly life “is never to be hated except in so far as it holds us subject to sin; although not even hatred of that condition may ever be turned against life itself.”¹³

Calvin goes even further. It is striking that, taking chapters six to ten of Book III as a climactic order, Calvin follows his discussion on the meditation of the future life (chapter 9) with a concluding chapter on the use and enjoyment of this life. It is also worth noting that Calvin, in this chapter on using this present life, affirms the liberty of the Christian believer to use the creation for *delight* as well as *necessity*. He contends that those who advocate ascetic austerity by insisting that men are permitted to use physical goods only in so far as necessity requires are far too severe. “For they would fetter consciences more tightly than does the Word of the Lord—a very dangerous thing.” He then adds: “Let this be our principle: the use of God’s gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author Himself created and destined them for us, since He created them for our good, not for our ruin.”¹⁴ Thus

a pipe organ in church, piano lessons for one's children, an original painting on the wall, attractive as well as functional homes, furnishings, table settings, even an occasional restaurant meal, steak, or glass of wine ought to be a matter of free conscience for a Christian. The three rules Calvin suggests in this regard to guide our conduct are moderation, contentment, and stewardship. Calvin's unsurpassed treatment of Christian liberty in Book III, chapter 19 of the *Institutes*, especially on the *adiaphora*, on things "indifferent" is also instructive here.

One more interesting point. Calvin's chapter on the meditation on the future life (III.ix) as well as book III of the *Institutes* as a whole, both conclude with a reference and chapter respectively on the resurrection of the *body*. This needs to be mentioned in order to forestall the obvious objection that Calvin's concern about the heavenly life is simply due to his infatuation with the Greek philosopher Plato.

This exposition of Calvin helps us come to understand and hopefully to resolve some of the tensions that have risen within the Reformed community of late. Specifically, when Anabaptists (including those now within the Reformed community who favor the Anabaptist vision) accuse the classic Reformed position of inevitably tending to a triumphalistic preoccupation with creation, dominion, power and thus to a defense of the capitalist and economic establishment, and that it fails to take into account the temptations of power, the limits of creation theology, the need for the cross—they simply have not read Calvin. Similarly, when certain self-consciously committed Calvinists in the Reformed community view *all* critical suspicion of political and economic power, all concern with the cross as an integral aspect of any truly Christian ethic, as Anabaptist heresy—they too have not read Calvin. There is an unmistakable tension in Calvin's ethics between an affirmation and enjoyment of this world (the creation pole) and a necessary detachment or even renunciation of this

world because of sin (the cross pole). A fully Reformed or Calvinist ethic does not choose between the cross and creation but affirms both. To tie these two themes together somewhat more clearly it is instructive to briefly contrast the views of the two Dutch Calvinists who have influenced the Christian Reformed Church as no others have, the two giants of the Dutch neo-Calvinist revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.¹⁵

The Vision of Abraham Kuyper

The distinctiveness of Bavinck's thought in comparison to Kuyper has not always been recognized. Their contemporaries often judged the two men as identical in conviction and thought and usually spoke of them in the same breath. Even many scholars have judged Bavinck to be simply Kuyper's follower in the Dutch Calvinist renewal, a milder, somewhat more careful figure, but a follower nonetheless, whose thought, aside from such controversial and highly debated subjects as presumptive regeneration, is hardly distinguishable from that of Kuyper.

What has been generally overlooked by scholars is the fact that while the imitation of Christ theme (and thus the cross) plays no significant role in Kuyper's cultural theology¹⁶ which is dominated by the two doctrines of common grace and regeneration (antithesis), Bavinck wrote two substantial articles on this theme, one at the beginning and the other at the close of his academic career. In the second of these articles (written in 1918, three years before his own and two years before Kuyper's death) Bavinck insists that the imitation of Christ may on occasion demand of the Christian *passive* resistance to an evil civil order and in all circumstances shapes and influences the Christian's *active* involvement in that order; even for a soldier on the battlefield. In principle there is no difference between the virtues which the imitation of Christ demands of soldiers and

what is demanded of Christians in their ordinary daily lives. While the Christian has the freedom in the Spirit to apply the imitation principle in varied and creative ways, imitation always remains a demand of discipleship. In a sympathetic but critical review of Charles Sheldon's famous *In His Steps*, Bavinck wrote:

The true imitation of Christ occurs when, freely and independently as children of God, in our circumstances and relationships, even when it demands of us the most severe self-denial and a bearing of the heaviest cross, we do the same will of God which Christ explicated and at the cost of His glory and life, even to death on the cross, perfectly fulfilled, since whoever does the will of God is Jesus' brother and sister and mother.¹⁷

The imitation of Christ theme illumines interesting personal and theological differences between Bavinck and Kuyper as well as key differences in their understanding of Christian life in the world.

We need to begin by briefly summarizing Kuyper's vision of Christian life in the world. This vision rests on the twin foundations of the doctrines of creation (common grace) and regeneration (antithesis). For Kuyper, Christianity in general and Calvinism in particular was more than a confessional or ecclesiastical position, but was a world-and-life view, a "life-system" or *Weltanschauung*. God's sovereignty was not narrow, having to do only with justification from sin, but cosmic, involving all of life. Human socio-cultural life, under the sovereignty of God, is the necessary area of distinctively Christian vocation. Because Kuyper did not wish to see Christian socio-cultural activity, including political activity, under the protective arm of the church, and because he also valued the cultural activity of non-Christians, he insisted that cultural activity is a fruit of "common grace," a given of creation, rather than a product of special or regenerating grace. At the same time Kuyper also insisted, by means of the

doctrine of regeneration, upon a radical *antithesis* between human cultural activity in general and distinctly Christian cultural activity. Kuyper's call to cultural action on the part of Christians by means of his doctrine of common grace is misunderstood if it is regarded simply as a call for Christians to join general humanity in a common cultural project. Regeneration is not only a matter of the inner soul, it divides all of humanity into two camps. "Two kinds of people" will develop "two kinds of science." For that reason, distinctively Christian (even Reformed) cultural institutions must be erected at all levels. The spirit of modernism and humanism must be opposed with what Kuyper called Calvinistic principles (*gereformeerde beginselen*).

It may be helpful to put this version in a trinitarian perspective. Kuyper's vision rests upon the first and third persons of the Trinity and the respective emphasis upon creation and regeneration, common grace and antithesis. Where, we might ask, is the person and work of Jesus Christ? Where is the emphasis upon the imitation of Christ, either passive or active, upon self-denial and cross-bearing, in Kuyper's vision?

It is not true, of course, that christology plays no role in Kuyper's vision. In his study of Kuyper's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, W.H. Velema contends that the fundamental tension in Kuyper's theology centers in the eternal Logos as Mediator of creation and redemption.¹⁸ Kuyper's own massive three volume work *Pro Rege: of het Koningschap van Christus*¹⁹ makes it clear how important and central christology, particularly the *kingly* (but not the *priestly!*) rule of Christ, is to his cultural-ethical vision. However, and this is the key point here, Kuyper's christology and the cultural implications drawn from it are decisively shaped by his understanding of the distinctive work of the first and especially the third person. More specifically, Kuyper's christology is dominated by the concern for the *cultural antithesis* which is the fruit of *regeneration* in the world of *creation*.

Where this becomes quite apparent is in the first part of the second volume of his *Pro Rege* where Kuyper considers the subjects (*onderdanen*) of King Jesus. It is here that Kuyper comes closest to the *imitatio Christi* theme as significant for culture and ethics. The titles of several chapters also suggest this: V. "Taking up our Cross (*Ons Kruis Opnemen*); VII. "Self-denial for Our King" (*Onszelven voor Onzen Koning Verloochenen*); IX. "Conformed to the Image of the Son" (*Den Beelde des Zoons Gelijkvormig*); and even X. "Pilgrims" (*Pelgrims*).

However, a close look at these chapters reveals how far Kuyper is from Calvin or Bavinck's conception of the imitation of Christ. Self-denial for Kuyper functions as a spur to cultural action *for the King!* It is a *motivating* force in the Christian life, but does not directly govern or shape the manner of that activity. To be conformed to the image of Christ, for example, is to take on the *uniform* of the King in order to enter into His battle *pro rege!* This battle is fought on earth in the various spheres of life. Rather than giving validity to a passive imitation of Christ and a self-denying posture vis-a-vis culture, these themes serve precisely as a further impetus to culture-transforming action. Thus Kuyper's christological emphases, too, are dominated by the themes of common grace and antithesis, creation and regeneration; his trinitarian cultural-ethical ideal by the first and third person.

The validity of this analysis is underscored by the fact that Kuyper's personal piety was often cast in the imagery of conflict and battle even when explicitly related to the cross. In a letter written to his daughter on February 3, 1903, Kuyper makes this revealing statement: "My calling is high, my task is glorious. A crucifixion scene hangs above my bed and when I look at it it seems as though the Lord asks me every evening: 'How does your struggle compare with mine?' Serving Him is so elevating and glorious."²⁰ For Kuyper the cross represents conflict and struggle, an aggressive

militancy in socio-cultural life, rather than self-denial or humility.

Bavinck's Critique of Kuyper

It is at this point that Bavinck's distinctiveness becomes clear, and at a personal level, first. Kuyper was the commander of an army, and the heat of the battle did not always provide the context for careful, well-reasoned explanations. A contemporary of both Bavinck and Kuyper put it this way:

Kuyper was the heroic warrior who knew how to utilize the weapons of dialectic against the vulnerable spots of his opponent, a warrior who could smell his enemies from afar . . . In the tumultuous, white-capped surf of the ocean of opinions Kuyper stood unmovable, his dark eyes piercing into the future, and with his mighty word he summoned his followers into the battle.

The commander-warrior image did not suit Bavinck, however:

Bavinck was no heroic warrior. His was an irenic nature. He was not weak-natured but compassionate; firm in his principles, he was, however, not a fanatic; always appreciative of others, he was thus less inclined to enter into battle.

And further:

Bavinck was a soft-natured, friendly man who seldom used a sharp word and always sought to find elements of truth which he could appreciate in an opponent. This was also very apparent in his dogmatic studies. He always sought to penetrate to the bottom of a question and at times found it difficult to come to a definite conclusion.

Kuyper showed no such reluctance:

Kuyper never hesitated, often categorizing and judging his opponents with a single word, and he always sounded his own trumpet with clarity and certainty.²¹

Bavinck's modesty and courteousness, mild judgment of others and other opinions were duly noted by his contemporaries. Modesty and mildness, not to mention courteous judgment, were hardly Kuyper's strong points. At one point in 1884 Kuyper was quite perturbed with Bavinck's appreciative critique of the liberal "ethical school of theology" and publicly chided Bavinck for his lack of polemical fire. Bavinck's response to Kuyper was characteristically moderate and concluded: "In polemics sometimes a soft word can also find a proper place."²² It is also worth noting in this regard that Bavinck was frequently offended by the autocratic leadership Kuyper exercised in the Dutch Calvinist political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party. In 1909 Bavinck resigned his position as a member of the executive committee of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, a resignation apparently directly related to dissatisfaction with Kuyper's leadership. In 1915, Bavinck and four others published a grievance against Kuyper's leadership, and it is worth noting that the document, of which Bavinck was the chief author, concludes with an appeal to the imitation of Christ theme as a critical principle against aspects of Kuyper's practice. Calling attention to the need for unity and freedom in the party, Bavinck noted the need for all honest convictions to be dealt with openly rather than forcibly suppressed. The most important factor in this openness is a disposition and spirit which he summarized as follows:

Above everything else it is necessary that everyone begin to re-examine himself, remove distrust from his heart, be prepared to deny himself, and not only dogmatically believe, but practically begin to live the apostolic injunction: Brothers, be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.²³

From the concluding sentence it is apparent that Bavinck's emphasis upon the imitation of Christ as an essential ingredient of Christian ethics and lifestyle arose *in part* out of reaction to Kuyper and his followers. Furthermore, Bavinck's use of this theme brings him closer to Calvin than Kuyper was. To prove that conclusively requires more space than this chapter permits and involves historical factors such as the concern about growing worldliness in the Dutch *Gereformeerde Kerken* at the turn of the century. In the remainder of this chapter some parameters for Christian and Reformed ethical reflection today will be suggested.

Christian and Reformed Ethics Today

While Kuyper himself warned against Calvinistic utopianism, his followers have not always heeded his warnings. When the doctrine of common grace is combined with an aggressive transformational zeal in which "we" the regenerate have the truth and the "other side" the lie, worldly utopianism or even tyranny could be the result. Kuyper's followers have not always been sensitive to this. On occasions, a triumphalism which assumes that the "Christianization" or "Calvinization" of numerous cultural areas will bring about, or even be, the millennium. As an example I would cite the following "Dream" of John Olthuis in the publication *Out of Concern for the Church*.

I find myself hurrying along to catch the opening of Parliament in Ottawa. The Christian political party is now the official opposition and Christian politicians are witnessing to the redeeming and reconciling responsibility of Government—the task of creating a truly just society. As I rush along Elgin Street I pass a church building and note with thankfulness that the sign reads **Elgin Congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ**, eloquent witness to the recent formation of one world-wide Christian institutional church—a world-wide joyful, dynamic, worshipping

church—a church which seeks the coming of the Kingdom of God rather than the Kingdom of the institutional church.

In the Parliamentary galleries I meet the head of the *Christian Labor Association of North America*, the international association of Christ-believing workers. I leave the gallery and pick up a copy of *Voice*, the Christian daily newspaper, and thank God for the headlines which read, “Government Monopoly in Education Ends.” The first paragraph of the lead story reads: “Bill 7777 established financial equality in education for all school systems.”

I stroll along Bank Street toward the newsstand to pick up a copy of *Meaning*, the Christian weekly which has replaced *Playboy* as the top circulating North American magazine. I’m just about to enter the newsstand when I meet one of the *Roving Ambassadors*, an internationally famous singing group, whose recent big song ‘Holding Hearts’ beautifully expresses the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ in music. Across the road the marquee of a movie theater announces that the smash hit *Turn the World Right-Side-Up* is in its 44th week.

As I reach for my copy of *Meaning* I see a member of the staff of the *Christian Family Counseling Service*, now supported by government finances, and the head of the *Christian Probation Services*, engaged in a lively conversation. *Time’s* banner catches my eye. It reads: “U.S. to follow Christian economic policy.” The article reports that the U.S. government endorses the approach to economic and fiscal policy developed by a Christian social, economic and political research team as the only possible way of stabilizing the chaotic U.S. economy.

As I turn to take my copy of *Meaning*, I notice that the leader of the *Christian Labor Congress* is walking to the cash register with the last copy. Never mind, I’ll get my copy at the next newsstand. I rush down the street past a bookstore and

notice that *Light Publishing Foundation*, the world-wide reformational press, has come out with a new series of Christian novels.

I bump into one of the members of the *Institute for Christian Curriculum Studies*. I mumble my apologies and rush on only to be engulfed by a horde of students buzzing excitedly on their way to the campus of Ottawa's Christian University.

I hurry to make the green light at the corner, and just miss being struck by a five-year-old shining Chevrolet. That reminds me. I've still not read the book which records how *General Motors* finally decided, through the work of Christian engineers, to make cars rather than money.

I take a deep, clean breath. My heart is full of joy, for America is a good place to live, a free place, free for all people to live out of their convictions. It is a place where God's name is honored and revered, for His people are honest, open, good representatives of Christ.

The next newsstand is sold out too.

And I reflect back on all those who said: "It can't be done. It's too idealistic. We'll never make it." I thank God that He saved us from the works of our hands and established the work of His hands.

But salvation is not near at hand. If this vision is to be realized, the Christian community must wake up. Our Christian historical understanding tells us that much hard work remains if we, with God's blessing, are to realize this vision.²⁴

It is this sort of triumphalism and even worldliness in Kuyper's followers that greatly offended Bavinck at the turn of the century. He concludes his second article on the imitation of Christ with some sharp criticism of economic sins in the life of the Dutch *Gereformeerde Kerken*. One of Bavinck's biographers recalls an incident in which Bavinck publicly admonished the Reformed clergy of worldliness and "mammonism." In a revealing passage in *The Certainty of Faith* Bavinck

singles out Kuyperian Calvinists for criticism on this matter of transformational worldliness.

While those nineteenth century Christians (Bavinck is referring to the pietist Christians, j.b.) forgot the world for themselves, we run the danger of losing ourselves in the world. Nowadays we are out to convert the whole world, to conquer all areas of life for Christ. But we often neglect to ask whether we ourselves are truly converted and whether we belong to Christ in life and in death. For this is indeed what life boils down to. We may not banish this question from our personal or church life under the label of pietism or methodism. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, *even for Christian principles*, if he loses his own soul?²⁵

In summary, I have argued in this chapter, by way of Calvin, Kuyper and Bavinck, that the cross as well as creation, the imitation of Christ as well as the cultural mandate, must be essential ingredients in a truly Reformed, Calvinistic ethic. Reformed Christians who focus only on creation, power, and dominion, leave themselves open to the criticism of Anabaptists who see among them an excessive love of the creation and an abuse of power, and who in reaction stress the cross. A truly Reformed ethic differs from Anabaptist ethics in that it considers the Christian life to be in a *tension* between the pull of creation and the demand of the cross while Anabaptist ethics *limits* itself to the cross. In Anabaptist ethical reflection, such as one finds in Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, the cross is the *only* and absolute model for the Christian life. A proper Reformed ethics can not ignore the cross (when it does it ceases to be truly Christian), but the cross is not everything and the imitation of Christ is not the *only* pattern for Christian discipleship. A proper Christian ethic must also include a positive affirmation of creation and advocate responsible use of the natural order, wealth, cultural and political power. In this Calvin's

three guides for proper use of this life, namely moderation, contentment and stewardship remain excellent counsel. What that concretely and specifically means for Reformed Christian living in North America today is not so much another chapter or a book as it is a *demand* upon each Christian who daily seeks to follow and serve Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 97.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
4. These two works published in Kampen by J.H. Kok (1931) and in Amsterdam by W. Kirchener (1907) respectively represent the only major systematic ethics written in the Dutch Reformed tradition.
5. *Institutes*, III.vi.1.
6. *Ibid.*, III.vii.1.
7. *Ibid.*, III.vi.3.
8. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), p. 68.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
11. *Institutes*, III.ix.1, 2.
12. *Ibid.*, III.ix.3.
13. *Ibid.*, III.ix.4.
14. *Ibid.*, III.x.1.
15. What follows is a succinct summary of my Ph.D. dissertation, "The Imitation of Christ Theme in the Cultural-Ethical Ideal of Herman Bavinck," University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1982.
16. In his *devotional* literature Kuyper does make reference to elements in the imitation of Christ such as cross-bearing, for example. See his *The Practice of Godliness*, translated and edited by Marian M. Schooland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), pp. 90-97.
17. "Wat Zou Jezus Doen?" *De Bazuin*, XLVIII (1900), no. 8.
18. *De Leer Van de Heilige Geest Bij Abraham Kuyper* ('s Gravenhage: Van Keulen, 1957), pp. 67ff, 121ff, 228ff, 245.
19. Published in three volumes by J.H. Kok, Kampen, 1911-1912.
20. Cited in G. Puchinger and N. Scheps, *Gesprek over de Onbekende Kuyper* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1971), p. 63.
21. J.H. Landwehr, *In Memorium: Prof. Dr. H. Bavinck* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1921), pp. 57-60.
22. Cited in R.H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1961), p. 19.
23. *Leider en Leiding in de Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1915), p. 56.
24. "The Wages of Change," in *Out of Concern for the Church* (Toronto:

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Wedge, 1970), pp. 20-21.

25. *The Certainty of Faith*, translated by Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ontario; Paideia, 1980), p. 94. The emphasized passage suggests a critique of Kuyper.

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