

*The*  
RELATION  
*of the* BIBLE  
*to* LEARNING



*H. Evan Runner*

*The*  
**RELATION**  
*of the* **BIBLE**  
*to* **LEARNING**

*The Unionville Lectures*



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*The Relation of the Bible to Learning*

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# Preface to Runner

*By Bernard Zylstra*

THIS BOOK CONTAINS the lectures which Dr. H. Evan Runner presented to two student conferences in 1959 and 1960. Runner was professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1951 until 1981, when he became professor of philosophy emeritus. The conferences were sponsored by the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies, now called the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, which today owns and operates the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. They were presented at a conference center in Unionville, a lovely little village just to the north of Toronto. The audience consisted primarily of students, teachers and preachers of

Reformed background who had emigrated from Holland to Canada after the second world war.

These lectures throughout bear the marks of the very specific situation to which they were addressed. These marks can be an obstacle in understanding Runner's message for a new generation of readers. In this essay I will explain the background of the events which led to the presentation of these lectures so that the reader may grasp the significance of those events as well as Runner's message itself.

The first striking thing about these lectures is that they were delivered by H. Evan Runner, an American of Scotch-Irish-Welsh descent, to an audience almost exclusively of young Dutch immigrants in Canada. What brought speaker and audience together? Why was their meeting at that time, in terms of these lectures, so significant for subsequent developments? We need a bit of historical background to see this.

### **Historical Background**

Runner was born in 1916, in Oxford, Pennsylvania, the only child in a solidly evangelical Presbyterian family. His life was divided between the



intense piety of home and church and the neutralizing impact of “the American way of life” evident in the public schools and in the maelstrom of a mixed Irish Catholic, Jewish and Protestant working-class neighborhood. The local Presbyterian congregation of which his parents were active members was deeply involved in the conflict between liberalism and orthodoxy that divided the Presbyterian church and led to the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929 and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936 under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen. The piety of his father and mother did not make him question the penetrating influence of liberal humanism on the American way of life. Instead, it nurtured his desire to become a missionary in foreign lands – Korea or China. His parents sacrificed much in the heart of the depression to send him to Wheaton College, the major center of evangelical liberal arts learning in the thirties. He was there from 1932-1936 – about the same time as Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry – except for his junior year, which he spent at the University of Pennsylvania to learn more Greek than Wheaton offered. That is important to note.

From the moment Runner entered college, his desire to be a missionary was constrained by his love for philosophy and a classical education. Here we detect the tension created in the life of a young student by the clash between the Gospel as interpreted in the evangelical-fundamentalist setting and the world of scholarship in its classical humanist interpretation. A growing awareness of that clash led Runner gradually to the realization that there are two fundamentally conflicting religious spirits at work in modern culture – faith in Jesus Christ and faith in human personality. Runner's development from 1936 to 1951 can be described in terms of his growing awareness of the range and depth of that conflict. At first, he viewed it primarily in terms of theology; he realized that the battle for the direction of the theological schools in the mainline churches concerned an accommodation of theology to the spirit of modern, secular thought. For this reason, he went to Westminster Theological Seminary in 1936 to study with Cornelius Van Til. And for the same reason, in 1939, he went to study with Klaas Schilder at the Theological School in Kampen, the Netherlands. Then he began to sense that the spir-

itual conflict in our culture is not one of theology, but that it is much broader, that it encompasses the whole of philosophy and science. This awareness greatly increased during his stay at Harvard University from 1940 to 1943, where he studied with George LaPiana and Werner Jaeger. And because of this awareness he returned to Holland immediately after the war to study with D.H.T. Vollenhoven of the Free University.

The period from 1946 to 1951 was decisive. During that time Runner learned that the conflict between the Christian faith and the humanist faith is not in the first place a *theoretical* conflict—whether theological or philosophical—but *of life in its concrete practice*, in politics, economics, culture, schooling, etc.

This explains Runner's interest in reformed Protestantism in Holland. This is how he recently described this interest:

I began to realize that there was a broad spectrum of Reformed life, and that I had never experienced anything like this before. And I began to ask myself: Where did all this come from? There was the theology that I was used to, there was the philosophy that

I was busy studying, but now I learned there was also a practical life. How were they related? I don't remember how I first got steered to Groen van Prinsterer<sup>1</sup> – probably through talks with Leo<sup>2</sup> at some meal or so at the girls' home – but I bought myself a copy of *Ongeloof en Revolutie* (Unbelief and Revolution) and read it... And then the problem that I originally had between philosophy and theology as two forms of scientific life got broadened out to also include pre-scientific life – what lies behind all this? And I began to see the importance of the religious

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1. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer's *Ongeloof en revolutie* (Unbelief and *Revolution*), first published in 1847, is the classic statement of the conflict between Christianity and humanism in the first period of the reformation of the Dutch church in the last century. Three chapters are available in an English edition published by Harry Van Dyk: *Unbelief and Revolution: Lectures VIII & IX and Unbelief and Revolution: Lecture XI* (Amsterdam: The Groen van Prinsterer Fund, 1975 and 1973). An abridged English edition of the entire work is forthcoming.
  2. Leo Oranje, who later became Runner's brother-in-law.

dimension of the heart and the covenant of God, and that all the various aspects of our life are embraced in that, and how that openness or closedness of the heart to His revelation which impinges upon us and to which we must respond gives direction to all the various expressions of our life, whether they are scientific or pre-scientific. That began to take on some shape, but only gradually, and I don't think that I got that all worked out until I had begun to teach at Calvin, really.<sup>3</sup>

Runner began to grasp that the work of Christians in politics, in labor, in journalism, in social work, and in scholarship presupposed “the revival of Biblical religion that occurred during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Netherlands.”<sup>4</sup>

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3. Harry Van Dyk and Albert M. Wolters, “Interview with Dr. H. Evan Runner,” in John Kraay and Anthony Tol, eds., *Hearing and Doing: Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), p. 348. (Emphasis added.)
  4. Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, *infra*, p. 36.

In the Netherlands the appearance on the scene of Groen van Prinsterer, Kuyper, the philosophy of the Law-Idea..., etc. signaled a desire for a radical break with long-established patterns of synthesis-thinking in favour of a radically scriptural outlook upon and approach to life. That is what has made Dutch Calvinism distinctive; that has been the strength of the revival of Christian life and scholarship in the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup>

When Runner returned to the United States in 1951, he was convinced that Christianity in North America was in need of “a revival of Biblical religion,” that is, “a radical break with long-established patterns of synthesis-thinking in favor of a radically scriptural outlook upon and approach to life.” His life mission consisted in an effort to contribute to such a revival of Biblical religion in North America. This reformational mission was directed primarily toward three major interrelated concerns. In the first place, he wanted to contribute to a new consciousness of the relation between the revelation of the Scriptures and the civilization of the West, especially in the context of the culture of

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5. Runner, *ibid.*, p. 97.

the United States.<sup>6</sup> In the second place, he pressed for a distinctly new way in which Christians should attempt to help shape the culture which they share with humanists in the modern age. Here Runner was greatly influenced by Abraham Kuyper,<sup>7</sup> the Dutch church reformer and political leader, who

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6. See H. Evan Runner, "The Christian and the World: An Historical Introduction to a Christian Theory of Culture." A paper read at the Faculty Board Conference of Calvin College and Seminary on September 9-10, 1953. Published in *Torch and Trumpet* (April, May, July, September, October) 1955.
  7. For a popular introduction to Kuyper's life, see F. Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (1960) (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978); for an introduction to his conception of Christianity and culture see S.U. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," *Communication and Confrontation* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1972, pp. 52-105); and for his view of the state see James W. Skillen, "The Development of Calvinistic Political Thought in the Netherlands." Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1973, pp. 225-273.

had pursued the avenue of organized communal witness and action on the part of Christians outside of the institutional church.<sup>8</sup> In the third place, Runner attempted to develop a new Christian mind which he considered essential for decisive spheres of modern society. The lectures contained in *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*<sup>9</sup> and in its companion

8. See H. Evan Runner, "Can Canada Tolerate the CLAC? The Achilles' Heel of a Humanistic Society." An address delivered in 1967 in Toronto at the Fifteenth Anniversary Convention of the Christian Labour Association of Canada. Republished in Edward Vanderkloet, ed., *A Christian Union in Labour's Wasteland* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), pp. 71-106.
9. The 1959 lectures were presented under the theme "The Relation of the Bible to Learning." They were published, along with the lectures of H. van Riessen on "The Relation of the Bible to Science" and those of Allan Leonard Farris on "The Relation of the Bible to History," in *Christian Perspectives* 1960 (printed by Pella Publishing Company in Pella, Iowa). Glenn Andreas, Runner's friend from Wheaton College days, who lived in Pella, personally arranged for the publication of these



volume, *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*,<sup>10</sup> are his most significant statements about the foundations and contours of such a Christian mind.

Why did he address these lectures to a group of young Dutch immigrant students in Canada? Was it an indication of a peculiar parochialism on Runner's part? One might indeed wish that he had

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lectures. The name "Christian Perspectives" served as title for most of the lectures presented under the auspices of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies in the 1960s. Runner's 1959 lectures were combined with his 1960 lectures on "Scientific and Pre-scientific" and "Sphere-Sovereignty" in a single volume entitled *The Relation of the Bible to Learning* in 1967 (Rexdale, Ontario: The Association for Reformed Scientific Studies). This volume was reprinted by Wedge Publishing Foundation in Toronto in 1970 and 1973.

10. See H. Evan Runner, "Scriptural Religion and Political Task," *Christian Perspectives* 1962 (Hamilton, Ontario: Guardian Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 135-257. These lectures were reprinted separately under the title *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1974).

eliminated some of the “Dutch” features from the published edition of these lectures. But the coming together of H. Evan Runner, and the sons and daughters of the Dutch reformed immigrants in Canada in the late fifties, should not be viewed as an ethnic narrowing of a broadly cultural and ecclesiastical task. Instead, it must be seen as part of Runner’s strategy. As a matter of fact, what at first seem to be signs of parochial idiosyncrasies, are in effect evidences of a very vital battle for the spiritual direction of the Dutch reformed immigrant community that sought a homeland in Canada after 1945. If that is understood, the reader will quickly identify these idiosyncrasies as live indications of a real struggle for the spiritual commitment and direction of a potentially powerful segment of God’s people.

Consider the factors in the situation.<sup>11</sup> Runner, as an “outsider,” had received very little positive re-

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11. I have explored the context of Runner’s work in “H. Evan Runner: An Assessment of His Mission,” in Henry Vander Goot, ed., *Life Is Religion: Essays in Honor of H. Evan Runner* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1981), pp. 1-14.

action to his call for a change of direction among the leaders in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States or among his colleagues at Calvin College. When approximately forty thousand Dutch Calvinists settled in Canada in the decade after 1947, Runner knew that they would be quickly absorbed as an ethnic group into the North American way of life – history had shown that numerous times before – unless an all-out effort were made to sensitize these immigrants to the fundamental differences in the spiritual foundations in Dutch society and Canadian society. Let us briefly compare these foundations.

### **Spiritual Roots of Anglo-Saxon Culture**

Since the inception of the modern age, Anglo-Saxon cultures have been marked by a non-violent accommodation between the Christian religion and the humanist religion, which centers on the self-realization of human personality on the basis of autonomy, that is, without benefit of divine revelation. In its radical expression, humanism posits the autonomy of the human will – either in its individual or collective form – as the final source of

the “values” by which individuals and societies are to live. It views reality as “nature” in the modern sense, i.e., as the object for the self-realization of the human will in scientific analysis, technological innovation, and industrial production. It views history as the progressive realization of an earthly paradise in which the obstacles to the material development of the human self are eliminated and which thus presupposes an abundance of economic goods. At its depth level, humanism is the post-Christian religion of the West. Again, in its radicality it negates the relevance of God’s being, the significance of divine revelation, the created structure of natural and social entities, the spiritual essence of human nature, the openness of human beings toward God, and the rootedness of cultural traditions and social institutions in the earlier Christian foundations of western civilization. At the same time, humanism in the modern age is a secularization of the Christian religion: it locates the *transcendent* spiritual realities of the Christian faith within the confines of an *immanent* historical process subject to the control of the autonomous human will.

Immanentized spiritual movements as a rule express themselves historically in three dialectically interrelated ways: radicalism, liberalism, and conservatism. (The secular political movements that parallel these expressions are generally referred to as the left, the center, and the right.) Radicalism is the most consistent outworking of the post-Christian surge toward autonomy. It entails a clear-cut secularization of existing religions and their embodiments in culture and society in order to clear the path for a modernization fully in accord with the demands of unrestricted freedom for human personality. This radicalism was articulated by Rousseau and Marx. Liberalism also proceeds from the premise of the autonomy of the individual person but is more accommodating in the implementation of that premise, willing to accept a strategy of gradualism in its demands of secularization, modernization, and societal restructuring. John Locke is the founder of this tolerant liberalism.<sup>12</sup> Conservatism has likewise abandoned revealed religion as the basis for the social order, and views cultural values as the expression of the autonomous human will.

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12. Cf. John Locke, *A Letter on Toleration* (1689).

But it differs from radicalism in its emphasis on the known values and institutions of the past over against the unknown values and structures of an uncharted future.

Moreover, it differs from liberalism in its stress on the collective good within which the individual has to arrive at self-realization. Conservatism, fearful of chaos and destruction which demands for change may entail, clings to the old order as long as possible, and then willy-nilly adjusts itself to the changes which a liberal regime has achieved in the meantime. But all three ideologies within humanism agree on this, that the public realm is autonomous, secular, and that revealed religion must be confined to the privacy of home and church.

Canadian society – especially its English-speaking part – presupposes this split between the public, secular realm, and the private, religious realm.

Since 1867, when Canada became politically independent, the primary political debate concerned the question as to whether the liberals or the conservatives should give leadership to the young,

diverse, and sprawling country.”<sup>13</sup> Because the liberals managed to get support in both English-speaking Canada as well as in French Quebec, the Liberal Party has been dominant in federal politics. The conservatives have been strong in provincial politics. In distinction from the United States and more in line with Great Britain, Canada also has an active socialist movement of a moderate thrust organized in the New Democratic Party. In short, ideologically, culturally, and societally, Canada fits well into the established patterns of the modern age.<sup>14</sup>

From his American experience, Runner knew that immigrant communities from Europe quick-

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13. See William Christian and Colin Campbell, *Political Parties and Ideologies in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974).
  14. For a more detailed discussion of this theme, see Bernard Zylstra, “Modernity and the American Empire,” *International Reformed Bulletin*, first-second quarter, 1977, pp. 3-19. Runner himself discusses the humanist political ideologies in *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*, pp. 56ff. Compare Eric Voegelin, “Liberalism and Its History,” *The Review of Politics*, 1974/1975, pp. 504-520.

ly accommodate themselves to the liberal-conservative spectrum of the public ideologies. He also knew that a revival of Biblical religion would not be culturally and societally relevant unless it could break through the monopoly of the humanist ideologies in the public realm. We have to search for a modern equivalent of the challenge of the early church to the tyranny of the Roman empire and the Reformation challenge to the monopoly position of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. So Runner turned to the Dutch Calvinist immigrants, for they knew from first-hand experience that societies can be structured differently.

### **Pluriform Democracy in Holland**

In 1945, Dutch society was structured to give the equal protection of the law to humanist, Roman Catholic, and Protestant and institutions in the sectors of health, education, and welfare. This structure was not a remnant of medievalism. It was the direct result of the challenge to the liberal-conservative monopoly that controlled Dutch politics after the French Revolution. That challenge was largely initiated by Groen van Prinster-



er, organized by Abraham Kuyper, and supported by the Roman Catholics. The challenge entailed a half-century of battles especially against individualist liberalism. These battles led to the demise of the conservative political party, to the diminution of the liberals' and socialists' influence, and to the birth of two prominent Calvinist political parties and a Roman Catholic one.<sup>15</sup> This religiously pluralist democracy guaranteed equality before the law of spiritually different schools, universities, labor unions, broadcasting corporations, health and welfare institutions, etc. In other words, Dutch society was structured to give proportionate justice to both humanist and Christian institutions.<sup>16</sup> The "accommodation" between humanism and Christianity

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15. In 1980 these three parties joined together to form the Christian Democratic Party.

16. See Hans Daalder, "On Building Consociational Nations: The Cases of the Netherlands and Switzerland," *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 23 (1971), pp. 355-370. Reprinted in Kenneth McRae, ed., *Consociational Democracy: Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 107-124.

took on a drastically different shape from that of the Anglo-Saxon countries.

In 1945, this consociational accommodation in the public realm experienced severe stress. Spiritual laxity had crept into both Calvinist and Roman Catholic circles. The very notion of relating Christian commitment to politics and culture was subjected to persistent critique from the Barthians. And the challenge of rebuilding the Dutch economy after the devastation of the second World War by the combined efforts of Christians and humanists in the socialist party intrigued many. At the same time, this very challenge contributed to a short-lived revival of Dutch Calvinism, in which the exponents of the new Christian philosophical movement at the Free University played a significant role. Herman Dooyeweerd entered the cultural battle with a penetrating analysis of the spiritual forces at work in western civilization as well as with a call for political and societal renewal on the basis of the Biblical ground motive.<sup>17</sup> Hendrik van

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17. Most of Dooyeweerd's articles addressed to these themes, published in weekly instalments in *Nieuw Nederland*, form the content of his *Roots of Western*

Riessen published *The Society of the Future* in 1952, which perceptively warned against the managerial society then in the making.<sup>18</sup> In this context the great post-war emigration to Canada took place. The Calvinist segment of the immigrants mainly joined the Christian Reformed Church, which itself had grown out of the migration of Reformed Christians from Holland to the United States in the nineteenth century, but which had a few small outposts in Canada.

From the start the spiritual direction of this immigrant community became a debated issue. The leaders in the church—there were few in other areas of life—came from both Holland and the United States. Both groups were divided. Should the newly established reformed community join the mainstream of Christians in North America, or *should it begin to articulate the cultural and societal significance of their spiritual heritage in their newly adopted*

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*Culture: Pagan, Secular, and Christian Options* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979).

18. Hendrik van Riessen, *The Society of the Future* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957).

*country?* That was the big issue. At the grass-roots level, the distinctiveness of reformed faith and practice was still very much alive. Often somewhat naively – a mark of faith, no doubt – they proceeded from the basic Reformation principle that the light of the Scriptures is a guide not merely for home and church but also for culture and society. So, with phenomenal sacrifices, they began to establish a system of Christian schools throughout Canada. In the industrial centers, many of the immigrant workers refused to join the trade unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO and instead organized chapters of the Christian Labour Association. Both in Toronto and in Edmonton initiatives were taken that later led to the organization of the Committee for Justice and Liberty, an active public interest group. And on June 16, 1956, a few Christian leaders, some of whom were pastors, formed the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies.

Runner was involved in this effort from the start. And when he was invited to be one of the three speakers at the first “Unionville Conference” in 1959, he seized the opportunity to articulate what in his view was the meaning of the migration

of these Calvinists to an Anglo-Saxon culture. Its ultimate meaning consists in the recovery of Biblical religion. This implied an all-embracing religious choice.

We have to choose which way we are going to go in Canada. Also in our scholarship. It is the choice between a way radically... and thus exclusively directed by Scripture and a way that seeks a synthesis between the Truth of the Word of God and the Lie of apostasy.<sup>19</sup>

The choice Runner posited was clear: living by the light of the Scriptures or living by the principle of synthesis. By articulating this central choice, Runner's lectures took on a significance far beyond the confines of Dutch reformed immigrants in Canada in 1960. Moreover, the choice he then articulated is still the overriding question Christians have to come to grips with today.

### **Change in Spiritual Climate**

In saying this, I do not mean to imply that there has been no significant change in the spiritual cli-

19. H. Evan Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, infra, p. 98.

mate in North America since 1960. As a matter of fact, we are currently experiencing a spiritual reorientation that may well become a turning point, especially in the United States. This reorientation is twofold. In the first place, there is the crisis of humanist liberalism. In the second place, there is the resurgence of evangelical Biblical religion, primarily within Protestantism but also within Roman Catholicism.

Above I briefly described the middling liberalism that has been the guiding spirit in Anglo-Saxon countries in the modern age. When Runner presented his lectures in 1960, this liberalism was experiencing the height of its triumphs in the United States,<sup>20</sup> with Canada following closely behind.<sup>21</sup> But today that liberalism has lost its sense of tri-

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20. See Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1955).

21. See Frank H. Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960). George Grant's *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965) is the most poignant critique of the impact of American liberalism on Canadian society.

umph because its ideology no longer provides an adequate frame of reference for coping with the severe economic, political, and societal strains in the advanced industrialized countries. A growing literature testifies to the crisis of liberalism, in both the United States<sup>22</sup> and Canada.<sup>23</sup> Within humanism, there is a marked turn to “neoconservatism,” which

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22. See, for instance, Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) and Norman Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks: A Political Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). For a critical analysis of this new consciousness in humanism, see Bernard Zylstra, “Daniel Bell’s Neoconservative Critique of Modernity,” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1978), pp. 337-355. This essay is reprinted in John Kraay and Anthony Tol, eds., *Hearing and Doing: Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979).
23. Cf. James Laxer and Robert Laxer, *The Liberal Idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada’s Survival* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1977); and H. J. Groenewold, *Multiculturalism: Can Trudeau’s Liberalism Tolerate It?* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978).

attempts to revive an earlier phase of individualism as a solution to the concrete problems of unemployment, inflation, etc.<sup>24</sup> In the political realm, the elections of Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan all testify to this reorientation in humanist leadership within the United States.

The resurgence of evangelical Protestantism is the second instance of reorientation in the spiritual climate in North America. These two developments confront us with this possibility: Can a revived evangelical Protestantism fill the vacuum of cultural leadership created by the decline of liberal humanism? Formulating the issue in that way gives us a parallel to the developments in Holland in the last century. At that time, a spiritually revitalized reformed Protestantism challenged liberalism in its pursuit to become the dominant public ideology in Holland, tempered only by a conservative wing. After a long struggle this challenge succeeded because of the prophetic leadership of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, the gradual conscientization

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24. Cf. Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who are Changing America's Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).



of the Protestant and Roman Catholic segments of the population, the organizational abilities of men like the Calvinist Abraham Kuyper and the Roman Catholic priest H. J. A. M. Schaepman, the nation-wide development of leadership cadres in the key sectors of culture, and the later appearance of the social democratic movement. The struggle led to the restructuration of Dutch society into a religiously or “ideologically” pluriform democracy, that is a societal system in which the liberal democrats, the social democrats, and the Christian democrats were given a proportionate share in the direction of public life.<sup>25</sup>

Today, a hundred years later, liberalism in North America is experiencing a crisis, not because it is challenged from the outside by either Christianity or Marxism but because of its inherent shortcomings and contradictions evident even to its own defenders. While this crisis occurs, we detect a simultaneous revival of evangelical Christianity. *In terms of the long-range perspective, we face*

25. See Michael P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe: 1820-1953* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

*the possibility of a new accommodation between the humanist-inspired neoconservatism with the religious revivals, as in the Moral Majority, or we face the most significant challenge of a revitalized Christianity making a contribution to a meaningful transformation of culture and society in the United States and Canada.*

Even the suggestion of the latter possibility confronts us with the nature of normative social change. We will have to ask ourselves what “objective” historical conditions must be present in a culture before normative societal transformation can occur. Further, we will have to address ourselves to the question of the proper means and strategies for achieving normative societal transformation.

This is certainly not the place to discuss these wide-ranging questions. We can hardly do more than raise them. But I’m willing to suggest that the “objective” historical conditions for normative societal changes include the following: firstly, the presence of structural problems or opportunities which may affect cultural continuity and social stability; secondly, a leadership vacuum in coping with these problems or opportunities; thirdly, the presence of a reservoir of spiritual strength from which

new leadership cadres can be formed; fourthly, the ability and willingness of a new leadership to translate the spiritual power into a new historical force; fifthly, sufficient political freedom to work towards change; and sixthly, adequate popular support.

In the light of these “objective” conditions, one can begin to explain the societal transformation occurring in Poland today. One can also explain its absence in South Africa today. But what about the United States and Canada? I believe that all of these “objective” historical conditions are present, especially in the United States, except for the third one: reservoir of spiritual power from which new leadership cadres can be formed.

Here there is a great degree of ambivalence. In a crisis of liberalism, which is the centrist ideological stance of humanism in the modern age, liberalism itself has two “safety valves.” It can make a drastic turn to the left or to the right. In secularized Roman Catholic countries, because of the societal holism of Roman Catholicism, the move is frequently towards a collectivistic left, as in the Mediterranean basin, or towards a collectivistic, even fascistic right, as in South America. In secularized Protes-

tant countries, because of the societal individualism of Protestantism, the move is generally towards an individualistic left, as in Germany today and Scandinavia, or towards an individualistic right, as in North America. Marxism or social democracy do not appear on the horizon as a viable reservoir of spiritual power. So it is not surprising that there is a revival of neoconservatism within the humanist camp.

But this ambivalent situation within humanism makes the revival of Christianity potentially significant. We then have to ask ourselves whether Christianity can fulfill that third historical condition for normative societal change: a reservoir of spiritual strength from which new leadership cadres can be formed.

This is really the larger question which Runner addressed in the lectures contained in this book and its sequel, *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*. I will address myself to the same question here in terms of an inventory of the dominant confessional visions or belief systems present within North American Christendom. I will do that in the spirit of Runner's thought but in my own words. My ty-

pology of Christian confessional visions will be very general; Runner's lectures supply the details I will omit. I will sketch the contours of the confessional visions, briefly state their implications for the relationship between religion and our life in the world, and point to the interplay between Christianity and learning as an illustration of that relationship.

### **Confessional Visions in the Church**

Every Christian confessional vision, at least within the range of orthodoxy, is based on the Apostles' Creed, the greatest of the Ecumenical Creeds formulated by the early church. These visions thus share a common confession concerning creation, fall, and redemption, which are preeminent teachings in Holy Writ. However, especially since the sixteenth-century Reformation, distinct confessional visions have come to the fore within western Christendom which differ fundamentally with respect to the meaning of creation, fall, and redemption, and the relationship between them. These differing visions have exerted a phenomenal impact on the way Christians live in the modern world. For these visions are the human responses to the meaning

of the Gospel itself, and they thus shape one's life practice, spirituality, ethic, worldview, and interpretation of Scripture. In the realm of scholarship, these confessional visions shape one's philosophy, theology, and one's understanding of history and science.

We can identify three prominent confessional visions, with numerous variations and overlappings. Fully realizing that labels can always be improved upon, I will refer to them as the nature-grace vision, the Anabaptist vision, and the reformed vision. I will distinguish them in terms of their respective understanding of creation, fall, and redemption, pointing only to their salient features.<sup>26</sup> The tripartite division of my typology should indicate that I am not discussing denominational divisions. In some measure, these visions are present in each denomination. It should also be kept in mind that I write from out of the reformed tradition which I am here articulating in my own way without reference to the changes which it has undergone nor

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26. Because of the general character of my typology, I have decided to omit foot-note references to exponents of the respective confessional visions.

with attention to its variations.<sup>27</sup>

### **1. The Nature-Grace Vision**

In this vision, creation is nature, the relatively self-sufficient system of things, plants, animals, and human beings. Though this system originated in creation, its existence is one of relative autonomy, independent of the upholding Word of the Creator. This system of nature is basically in good order, is not affected by the fall into sin, and is thus also not in need of redemption. Right from the start, this position distinguishes between nature and the special relationship of God to human beings, which is described by the Biblical term “the image of God.” When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they broke this special relationship; they lost the image of God. As natural beings they continued to exist quite normally, but with a significant defect. In redemption, God graciously restores this defect. Grace is thus

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27. I have articulated the Biblical foundations for what I here describe as “the reformed vision” in “Thy Word Our Life,” in James H. Olthuis et al., *Will All the King’s Men?* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1972), pp. 153-221.

an addition to the natural order. Grace is a *donum superadditum*, a superadded gift which heals the loss of the image of God. Grace perfects nature.

In this approach, we can thus speak of two realms – that of nature and that of grace – which are hierarchically related to each other. Nature is the prelude, the stepping-stone to grace. We can also speak of two types of revelation. First there is general revelation in nature, which enlightens every person born in this world, and which is thus the basis of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians in culture, society, philosophy, and science. Beyond general revelation there is the Bible, which is the special revelation of God's gracious redemption, of His love in restoring the image of God through Jesus Christ, and of the implications of this restoration for our life on earth. This special revelation does not eliminate general revelation, but supplements it. If there seems to be a conflict between them, then special revelation is to be followed.

This nature-grace position has very distinctive ramifications for the way a Christian lives in this world. His life is divided between the realm of na-



ture and the realm of grace. In the realm of nature, he builds his marriage and family, makes a living, goes to school, and engages in sports. Culture and society are based on nature. The Christian is quite willing, even highly interested, to take his share of social, cultural, and political tasks because, after all, he is a human being with human responsibilities. He executes these tasks in cooperation with non-Christians on the basis of a common ethics founded on natural revelation, natural law, and the common light of reason.

Beyond the realm of nature, the Christian also lives in the realm of grace. This is the higher realm and ultimately much more important since here we encounter the love of God in Jesus Christ, Who restores the image of God in us through His incarnation, death, and resurrection. Here we encounter the Holy Spirit, Who makes us a member of the Body of Christ, the communion of the faithful, on our way to our final heavenly destination. In this realm of grace, we are face to face with the divine mysteries which far transcend our natural life.

In this approach, the task of scholarship is understandably also divided between the realms of

nature and grace. Philosophy and science belong to the natural realm, and Christians are encouraged to engage in them because without them our life suffers. Medicine, dentistry, engineering, economics, psychology and all of the other “natural” ways of knowing are perfectly legitimate pursuits for the Christian. Here again the Christian and the non-Christian perform their tasks identically on the basis of a common reason which has not been negatively affected by sin. Within the realm of nature, reason has an autonomy of its own so that it is not in need of special revelation.

Fundamentally, the nature-grace position is one of accommodation: the insights of the non-Christian can be accommodated and taken over by the Christian as long as they are based on reason and not on biased ideologies. For a long time it was thought by scholars who accepted the nature-grace vision that the theories of Plato and Aristotle were the least biased because they were rational, and that Christians could do best by heavily relying on them. This was especially the case in the high middle ages, when great Roman Catholic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas built their philosophies in dependence on

Aristotle. In modern times this has changed since it is argued that philosophers like Descartes and Kant, or Hegel and Marx, or Heidegger and Wittgenstein, have presented a more adequate account of nature than did Plato and Aristotle.

Wherever the nature-grace vision is accepted, one encounters different accommodations with non-Christian thought and practice, because there is no specifically Christian criterion with which one might judge what suits the realm of nature best. In the modern age, which is marked by a great diversity in humanist thought and practice, one is confronted with a great diversity of accommodations on the part of Christians. The nature-grace vision has thus greatly contributed to divisions among Christians, both in their practices and in their theories.

In the nature-grace position, scholarship is also very important for the realm of grace, where theology probes the mysteries of redemptive revelation. Here human learning reaches its climax because we move beyond nature to the presence of God. Here we begin to understand that natural philosophy and science are really only a prelude to theology. If one desires to be distinctly Christian in one's

scholarship, one will have to be engaged in this sacred discipline because it prepares one for distinctly Christian services, notably within the domain of the church itself.

Though one cannot draw immediate parallels between confessional visions and denominations, it is not altogether mistaken to say that the nature-grace vision has shaped the orthodoxy, especially the Roman Catholic and the Episcopalian churches. At the same time, it has exerted a phenomenal impact within Protestantism, especially its mainline denominations. It nurtures the worldview of most leaders in the World Council of Churches. Today a great many evangelical intellectuals are in the grip of this vision. And it has seriously undermined the reformed vision, especially among intellectuals, also in the denominations that stand in the Presbyterian and reformed tradition.

## **2. The Anabaptist Vision**

Next to the nature-grace vision, the Anabaptist confessional vision is second in influence in the United States and Canada. At times, its understanding of creation, fall, and redemption is viewed as a variant

of the nature-grace approach, with this difference, that nature is considerably more depreciated in comparison with grace. Though there are parallels, I believe that the Anabaptist vision is qualitatively different from the nature-grace stance.

Belonging to the family of Christian orthodoxy in which the ecumenical creeds are accepted, the Anabaptist also confesses that heaven and earth are the creation of God the Father. However, in the Anabaptist view the revelational and normative meaning of creation is lost to us because of the radical impact of the fall. While one might say that the nature-grace vision takes its point of departure in the self-sufficiency or autonomy of nature, the Anabaptist vision proceeds from the world as fallen. The fall stands as a barrier between us and the original creation, to which we no longer have access. Creation may have been good in the eyes of God when He completed it, but that goodness was destroyed by sin. Hence whatever creation revealed of God and its own normative quality before mankind fell into sin, this creational revelation is irrelevant to us in our present situation since we have knowledge only of a fallen creation. The structures of creation

may initially have been proper conditions for human life on earth, but today we know them mainly in their demonic forms as the powers of evil.

In view of this it is not unsurprising that redemption in the Anabaptist vision is not viewed as the perfection or completion of nature by grace, as it is in the nature-grace conception. The fall into sin is so devastating that it leaves nothing to be perfected or completed. Hence redemption is not just liberation or deliverance from the fall, but from the fallen creation. There is really no point of contact between creation and redemption; the barrier of sin continues to keep them apart. In the divine plan, redemption takes the place of creation. Redemption is not a matter of God making all things new but of making all new things. Here we see the original meaning of the term "Anabaptist." It was a description of those Christians who wanted to be baptized again (Greek: *ana*). The baptism of infants was considered meaningless by the sixteenth-century Anabaptists because it was a sacrament of grace performed upon a creature still in the fallen world. The sacrament had to be performed again when there was certainty that the fallen creature had in-

deed moved out of the kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of God's redeemed people. Though the term Anabaptist originated in the sixteenth century because of the battle concerning infant baptism, it really describes a confessional vision that was present in the church from the outset. The early church rejected it in the extreme form of gnosticism, which viewed creation as inherently evil, and redemption as liberation from that evil creation. In more moderate forms, this vision expressed itself in the asceticism of the early and medieval church. It continued to influence a significant segment of often persecuted believers who at times maintained an underground existence alongside of the dominant nature-grace position embodied in the Roman Catholic Church. With the Reformation challenge to Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century, the Anabaptist vision immediately surfaced in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Holland.

The Anabaptist vision also has distinctive ramifications for the way a Christian lives in this world. Since this world is fallen, and we have no way of ascertaining the good elements within it, it cannot be a home for the redeemed child of God. His

spirituality and style of life are conditioned by his conviction that he is just passing through the fallen world until he reaches his heavenly destination. It is a spirituality that nurtures martyrdom – victimization by the forces of evil instead of battling them. The Anabaptist in principle is a pacifist, not merely with respect to political warfare but with reference to any conflict a believer may encounter during his earthly sojourn. The focus of the faithful is not on society but on building the Body of Christ next to it: the alternative community of believers, where love, justice, kindness, and all of the other New Testament virtues are to be practiced. Here lies the great strength of the Anabaptists. Bands of Mennonites, Hutterites, and Amish Christians have maintained their spiritual and communal identity for centuries without overt use of political power, though not without its legal protection.

Anabaptist lifestyles vary. For some groups isolation from the world implies geographic distance from centers of worldly culture, its science and technology. Such groups become expert in agriculture, relying on technologies and means of transportation of a bygone day. For others the isolation



is primarily spiritual, allowing greater flexibility in the use of the fallen world's resources. For some the world is to be left to its own sinful devices. For others the task remains of actively and publicly witnessing against the evils brought about by the demonic powers operating in the fallen world. Such witness can then take place in model communities of love right within the citadels of economic and political power. But however different the styles of life may be in which their vision is expressed, the Anabaptists are unanimous in maintaining that the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of Christ unfold in terms of two separate cultures and two distinct histories – the history of a fallen world and the history of a redeemed world. There is no intrinsic connection between these two cultures and histories until the final day of judgment.

This stance has weighty implications for scholarship. At one level the Anabaptist tends to be a *homo unius libri*, a person of one book, the Bible. Its wisdom suffices. This has led to a pronounced anti-intellectual indifference to learning, as among the Amish who continue to insist on keeping their children out of high school. At another level there

is significant theological and ethical reflection as a contribution to the life of the alternative communities of believers. At still a third level, Anabaptist scholarship is devoted to an analysis of the evil power structures in the fallen world. A great deal of effort is exerted at this third level today, especially by the Sojourners group in Washington, D.C. But the development of philosophy and science as such does not belong to the tasks of the Anabaptist Christian. If that development is necessary to keep the kingdom of this world intact, then the unregenerate had better assume that responsibility, like the soldier in the battles between political powers. Also, in the battle for Christian scholarship, the Anabaptist remains a pacifist bystander.

The actual membership in Anabaptist or Mennonite churches is relatively small. Nonetheless, I would venture the hypothesis that the Anabaptist confessional vision is the most accepted one among grass-roots Protestant Christians in the United States and Canada. Outside of the mainline churches, there are hundreds of denominations that originated in the United States since 1850 as the frontier moved west. Most of these denominations, though

creedally distinct on many points, share a common Anabaptist vision of life. Its impact on the religious outlook is increasing because of the intensive use of radio and TV by its popular exponents, also in denominations with roots in the nature-grace and reformed visions.

### **3. The Reformed Vision**

The distinctive trait of the reformed confessional vision consists in the all-inclusive way in which creation, sin, and redemption are understood. Everything that exists – in nature, culture, and society – is founded in creation, is affected by sin, and is in need of redemption.

Creation is the theatre of God's glory. That is how it was made in the beginning; that is what it is intended for today. From the outset God the Father established an all-embracing covenant with His creation – a covenant of divine love on the one hand and creaturely praise on the other. The covenant is as wide as creation. That covenant came into being when God spoke His words, "Let there be," and there was. The Creator speaks His majestic Words, utters His ordinances, and creatures come into be-

ing immediately shaped as praisers, servants, lovers of their Maker. The texture of creatureliness is a fabric of obedient response. To be a creature is to be an addressee of the sovereign Word of the Lord: “be My servant, sing forth My praise.”

Moreover, the words and decrees of the Maker not only call forth the creation. They continue to be addressed to the creation so that they are the laws for nature, the mandates for culture, and the love commandments for society. The cultural mandate is a creation ordinance. The command to love God and our fellows is a creation decree. As a matter of fact, the dual love commandment constitutes the core of all the laws God the Father addresses to mankind. To be human is to be a lover, first of God, then of our neighbor.

Sin is disservice, disobedience, dishonor. It is the antithesis to God’s thesis. It is the refusal of mankind, in Adam its covenantal head, to love, serve, and obey the Creator. Sin is all-embracing because, like a poison, it pervades all of the four relationships in which humans exist. It ruptures the covenantal relationship with God. It brings disharmony in the relation between the self (“soul”) and

its faculties – including reason – by drawing them into a stance of disobedience. It causes hatred in social relations. And it destroys the peace in man's relation with nature, of which mankind was created crown.

Nevertheless, the power of sin is not equal to the power of the Word of the Lord. Sin cannot destroy creation; it can only misdirect it. Also, after the fall, God continues to speak His Word: "Adam, where art thou?" Sin cannot eliminate the creation ordinances. Because of His universal grace in the promised Messiah, God continues to utter them to His creation, though now in the context of a fallen world. But that fallen world does not bring into being its own set of rules, as if sinful creatures are now called to something less than love. Moreover, again because of God's universal grace preserving the cosmos, sin does not lead to the destruction of the fabric of creation, structured to serve and praise its Maker. Sin misdirects creatures. It does not destroy their structure, including their created faculties and potentialities. The latter do not become demonic powers, as the Anabaptist tends to think. Sin misguides the functioning of these faculties to apostasy.

sy, “exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men or birds or animals or reptiles” (Rom. 1:23). Only in their cultural, intellectual, and societal mis-directions can these creaturely potentialities become actual demonic powers. This we see in the abuse of sexuality, the absolutizations of philosophy, the love of money, the corruption of power into tyrannies or empires, or the terror of nuclear arms.

Redemption is the restoration of creation as the theatre of God’s glory. God the Father accomplishes this restoration through the Lamb Who was slain, reconciling to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20). The history of the cosmos, from paradise lost to paradise regained, climaxes in the Hallelujah chorus sung by every creature: “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13).

In this light redemption is not the reparation of a defect occasioned by the fall and resulting in the loss of the image of God, as the nature-grace position holds. Nor is redemption the start of a new

project by God because His first one of creation really failed, as the Anabaptist position holds. Because of redemption, the whole creation groans in travail, waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, when it will be set free from its bondage to decay and be encompassed in the glorious liberty obtained for the children of God (cf. Rom. 8:19f). In this way the reformed confessional vision rejects both the dualism inherent in the nature-grace position, which confines redemption to the realm of grace, and the two-kingdom position of the Anabaptist, which limits God's reconciliation to the community of the faithful.

The reformed vision of creation/sin/redemption has distinctive ramifications for the way a Christian lives in this world. The reformed Christian affirms creation in all its goodness. This is his Father's world, a home for mankind. He does not at all mind being a worldly Christian in the sense that with joy he will assume his share of the many callings to be accomplished in the history of culture and the building of society. The reformed Christian indeed has a "Calvinistic work ethic" in every dimension of human affairs.

The reformed Christian takes his point of departure in God's thesis of creation. He knows that many callings in the world can only be done in cooperation with his fellows – believers and unbelievers – since the cultural mandate is given to mankind as a whole. He is conscious of the fact that, because of God's universal grace, glimmerings of creational revelation, including God's eternal power and deity, press upon unbelievers, clearly to be perceived in the things that have been made (cf. Rom. 1:19f).

But in his worldly occupations – as homemaker, carpenter, farmer, teacher, journalist, judge, engineer, or whatever – the reformed Christian takes sin seriously. He will not change God's common grace to all men into the nature-grace notion of neutrality in worldly affairs. He knows that the unbeliever tends to exchange the truth about God for a lie and serve the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). The antithesis of sin remains; the spirit of the antichrist is always present, hence also in his own heart. He knows that creational revelation must be read in the light of the Scriptures, the light upon our path in this world. The Scriptures instruct us for salvation; they are profitable for teach-



ing, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that we, as men and women of God, may be complete, equipped for every good work (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).

In this context the reformed Christian takes a very positive attitude to scholarship, in theology but also in philosophy and the sciences. The performance of that task is a dimension of the cultural mandate; it is indispensable for the unfolding of creation's potentials and for the alleviation of pain and suffering. Like the governing authorities, science is God's gift to mankind for its good. And yet, the effects of sin are present also in the realm of scholarship. Perhaps they are present there more than in any other sector of the western civilization because its idols have been in the realm of theory for so long. Philosophy was an idol in antiquity and science is an idol in modernity. In the realm of learning the reformed Christian acknowledges sin's impact on human reason. He rejects the autonomy of the human mind and the accommodation of non-Christian philosophies to the truth revealed in Holy Writ. He will avoid an alliance with Plato and Aristotle as well as with Marx, Dewey, White-

head, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. The reformed Christian claims the world of culture, art, and scholarship for Christ, but in the light of Paul's warning: "do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let us return to the issue at stake. In mentioning the main historical conditions for normative social change, I listed as essential the presence of a reservoir of spiritual strength from which new leadership cadres in society can be formed. Can the Christian religion provide such a reservoir of sufficient depth and breadth to fill the cultural and societal leadership vacuum created by the decline of liberalism?

H. Evan Runner presented an affirmative answer to this question in his *The Relation of the Bible to Learning* and *Scriptural Religion and Political Task*. He presented that answer when liberalism was at its height. He also indicated that the recovery of the reformed vision of life would be essential to an adequate coming to grips with the structural

problems we face today. The nature-grace vision, in his view, is one of synthesis, one of accommodation with humanism in its leftist, centrist, or rightist expressions. The Anabaptist vision, with which he deals less explicitly, places Christianity outside of the mainstream of culture. In pointing to the reformed vision, Runner at the same time redefined it, especially with respect to the central theme of the Word of God. And he articulated the relevance of the reformed vision with respect to three key areas. In the lecture entitled “Scientific and Pre-scientific,” he dealt with the foundations of Christian philosophizing. Then, in the lecture on “Sphere-Sovereignty,” he turned to the structure of society. Finally, in “Scriptural Religion and Political Task,” he presented his analysis of the place of the state and a critique of the political ideologies of centrist humanism.

These lectures were presented in 1959, 1960, and 1961 to future leaders of the reformed community that emigrated from Holland to Canada after the second world war. They have shaped the leadership in that community more than any other similar statement.

Their impact went far beyond the confines of that original setting. Today there is a change of potentially great significance in the spiritual foundations of North American culture. These lectures prophetically focus on the Biblical direction of that change. Hence a careful, patient reading of them by a new generation will be eminently rewarding.

The President's Office  
Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada

# 1

## General Introduction

YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE Reformation in Canada, I am happy to participate in this first Student Conference sponsored by the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies. I hope today and the two days following to present three lectures entitled: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. In the lecture of Prof. Farris this morning you heard something about the use that was made of these three words by the great German philosopher Hegel. I shall not be using the words in Hegel's sense, but that will become clear as the lectures proceed.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime it will, I

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1. For the very important difference between religious and analytical dialectic, antithesis and synthesis, see Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, ed. Mark Vander Vennen and Bernard Zylstra, trans. John Kraay (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), pp. 7-14.

think, help you to follow and hold on to the sense of my remarks if you will keep in mind this triad: thesis – antithesis – synthesis.

### **Purpose of the Conference**

This Study Conference, that we are just now beginning to enjoy, is designed to give the more studious and concerned among you, Reformed young people in Canada, a special opportunity to reflect on your distinctive calling in the world of scholarship and in society, to offer you insight that will help while you are possibly in attendance at colleges and universities, technical and professional schools in Canada, where the light, the revealing light, of the Word of God is withheld from whatever work you are there engaged in. It is also our purpose to call attention to the really desperate need that exists here in Canada for a center of scholarly research and university instruction of our own, where we can, above all, be ourselves, where, I mean to say, we can quite naturally and happily go from Scripture to our field of research and back again, glorying in our God and Father, Who is above all and blessed forever.

### **The Question**

And now I shall not waste any of the precious moments at my disposal, but – in accordance with the injunction found in Ecclesiastes 9:10 – plunge at once into the heart of the problem assigned to me, viz. *the relation of Scripture to learning*.

The relation of the Word of God to learning – there you have what I do not hesitate to call the most important question the Christian student can put to himself. In its very nature the problem is one that will always be of the most fundamental importance. But in a special way it presses with insistence and urgency upon us here at this still early stage of the emigration from the Netherlands. It is part of a larger question: The relation of the Word of God to our life in the world. In this broader form it is THE question of the emigration. And if your emigration forces you in a new and living way to give (scriptural) account of this relation, then we can look forward to a promising future.

### **Ambiguity and Conflict**

After you have emigrated to Canada or the U.S.A. (or, I might just as well add, to Australia or New

Zealand) you discover to your dismay that the term Calvinism does not always stand for the same thing; you come to find out that Dutch Calvinism – the term is an unfortunate one, and ought to mean, if used at all, simply the revival of Biblical religion that occurred during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries in the Netherlands – that Dutch Calvinism (so understood) and the Calvinism you encounter in limited circles of the (predominantly) Anglo-Saxon civilizations are not one and the same thing. The difference can and does give rise to conflicts, serious conflicts. And your generation is historically called upon to resolve the clash. Much trouble and spiritual decline all along the line could come from a well-intentioned but ill-informed attempt, or better, series of attempts at resolution.

### **Conflicting Attempts at Resolution**

Already, the growing awareness of the conflict has brought some measure of disunity into our ranks. Some would seem to have fallen victim to the blood and soil – or, seeing the make-up of your old homeland, perhaps I would better speak of blood and soil and water – doctrine that Dutch Calvinism in some



unexplained way is attached to life-forms exclusive to that area of the world's surface. These persons are in the process of giving in to a kind of relativism, and are farther along the road to spiritual impotence than they themselves perhaps realize.<sup>2</sup> Others attempt by a compromising give-and-take to harmonize the conflicts that arise, but without really penetrating to the real cause of the conflicts. Like the doctor who can so often only treat symptoms, they never know what is going to happen next, and, since the disease they are dealing with is such a virulent one, they will be confronted with one crisis after another until in the end they stand in the presence of death. Still others, often called extremists or fanatics by representatives of the first two groups, feel somehow – and by “feel” here I mean not a merely psychical feeling, but rather a central-religious or prophetic discernment (what an older generation would no doubt have called “reformed antennae”) – that the difference between the two forms of Calvinism calls for decision. No relativism. No piece

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2. See my *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1974), p. 115ff.

by piece surrender by accommodation to the new ways (sometimes euphemistically called the process of inevitable adjustment by those who do not “see” in faith the things hoped for). But radical choice, based on prophetic insight. To choose a different way to go does not necessarily mean isolation from persons of another “way.” It allows for the greatest possible personal contact. By “in our isolation lies our strength” Groen van Prinsterer did not mean that we must separate ourselves from persons, but that in all our contacts with them we must be vividly aware of the distinctiveness of the rule by which our lives are directed.

### **“Principle” Governs Attempts at Resolution**

We cannot here, of course, go into the question in its wider form. I only wish to point out that at the bottom of the difference between the various things called by the name of Calvinism, and consequently also at the bottom of the various attitudes assumed towards that difference, at the very rock bottom of all of this there lurks the question we have to deal with, the question of the relation of Holy Scripture to our life in the world. If you have been following

me so far you can see that we are here dealing with fundamentals.

Putting the matter quite simply, we can say that our question is the question about the meaning of Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and light for my path.”<sup>3</sup> In yet another formulation our question is the question of principles. Now, I know that in the Netherlands an earlier generation may sometimes have over-worked the idea of principles, and also that at times perhaps the question of principles, Reformed principles they were called, was talked about too abstractly. And I am very much aware that the positivistic atmosphere of many of our Anglo-Saxon universities with its vaunted ideal of “objective” factuality works confusingly upon the Christian immigrant student at this point. But the question of principles is, after all, simply the question as to whether the Bible is a norm, a regulative rule (Latin, *regula*) for our living, whether it gives a direction to our living in this world, whether it directs us how to go, in what way to go. The Presbyterians among us will recall

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3. This and all subsequent biblical references are taken from the New International Version.

that the second question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?” And the answer follows: “The word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.”<sup>4</sup> That is it. That is the answer to the question whether our life is governed by principles. And that is why it is simply impossible to avoid the principal question by an appeal to the “practical” bent of your Canadian neighbors. For the Word of the living God has come with its revealing light into our life, and *all human life*, whether men are aware of it or not, *is some kind of response to that Word*. Practice must therefore always derive from principle, although awareness of its principal origin – e.g. in a life-practice that has become a dead tradition – may grow vague with the passage of time. That is to say, *practice always derives from a way of “seeing” your life that you take to be normative*. In all practice there is present some kind

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4. *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Divines* (Chicago: Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1943), p. 5.

of acknowledgment of an Order or Structure of things. It is this fact, and this fact alone, that makes for the high seriousness of life for you Reformation youth, the first generation of Dutch Calvinists in Canada. If you give yourselves whole-heartedly to its consideration you will undoubtedly become men, big men, *men of God*, walking with the greats of Hebrews 11. Here is all the human worth that the humanist strives to achieve in vain because he “sees” the structure of life wrongly, because he is guided by a wrong principle, because his life is not directed by the revealing light of the Word of God.

**Our Problem Posed for the World of Learning:  
Two “Ways”**

The life of the student is but a part of human life in general, so that the question of the relation of the Word of God to learning is simply part of the broader question. Nevertheless, the more restricted area has some difficulties of its own, and for us who are students, those difficulties are real hurdles that must be got over. To most of us, at least at first glance, the principles of mathematics and logic, for example, would very much

seem to remain the same, whether Scripture is brought into the picture or not. The statement  $2 + 2 = 4$  is true for everybody, is it not? And thermodynamics would seem to remain thermodynamics, and agronomy, agronomy. What in the wide world then might the relation of Scripture to these and other areas of learning be? The very thought tends to make many persons think of any talk of a Christian cultivation of the several fields of learning as downright obscurantism and plain hypocrisy. Can one ever really speak of an intrinsic connection between the Word of God and the world of learning?

I spoke purposely of an *intrinsic* connection. We can all understand that you can have a Christian man teach biology, or chemistry, or philosophy. But that is not the question. That could be a merely extrinsic connection. I recall that when a few years ago, after a member of the Reformed Churches had been appointed professor of philosophy at one of the state universities in the Netherlands, that some Christian parents involved in the province began to ask in public whether it would henceforth be necessary to send those of their children who wished to

study philosophy all the way to Amsterdam to the Free University. Professor Vollenhoven wrote very simply about it that those parents would have to learn to distinguish between a Christian man teaching philosophy and the teaching of a Christian or Scriptural philosophy. And he meant by it that the matter of supreme importance is whether the man, who in his personal faith is Christian, has learned through and in that faith *to see problems of his field of study in the revealing light of the Word of God.*

That brings us back to our question, whether there is an intrinsic connection between the Word of God and the world of learning. Can we sincerely speak of Scriptural principles here? Is Scripture also in this area of our life a lamp to our feet and light to our path? If we cannot honestly answer these questions in the affirmative, then we are left with merely Christian people who work at a science. A science, presumably, that has principles of its own, which secrets it yields up to those who go to work on it. An *autonomous science* (from Greek *auto* [self] *nomos* [law], i.e. itself its law, a law to itself), as we are accustomed to speak of it. But if that is the true state of affairs it does indeed involve a different con-

ception of the Word of God and of the Christian religion. For there is then one area, at least, in our human life for which the Word of God gives no light, and indeed which itself requires no such light inasmuch as it would seem to have a light of its own (its own principle), at which we can get unaided. (The idea of the older metaphysics, of a science of a Being that exists in itself and has a – noetic – light of its own.) Then the Christian religion would have a limited validity and would have to agree with, be accommodated to, that other light of science.

### **The “Way” Based on Relevancy**

We have now perhaps reached the place where we can sum up our impression of the significance of the question with which we are to deal in these lectures. We can say at once that it has become evident that our question is nothing less than the Place of the Great Decision. Our question constitutes the Great Divide, the Watershed of our future course as Dutch immigrant students of Reformation Christianity in Canada. For if the Word of God has real relevancy to the world of learning itself, in the sense that it brings a definite direction into our work



there that makes talk of a Christian cultivation of learning not just so much idle, even hypocritical, chatter of old greybeards but a matter of paramount concern for the rendering effective of Christ's redemption in that life of the Creation, then it will be that directing faith that gathers us into a fellowship. And whatever our relations to others who, in other spirits, work in the same areas as we, our concern to understand the significance of the Word for our field of study will attach us first to other students of the same conviction of faith. Since, as we shall have occasion to see, all fields of learning constitute an organic whole, and only in organic connection can we hope to attain the proper results in our work, this fellowship in our conviction of faith will require a scholarly community of our own in Canada, a fellowship of faith that pertains to the world of learning. This scholarly community, which at the same time would be a fellowship of faith, would then be a configuration (i.e. gestalt) in the developing Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ. Faith will have assumed a visible shape or pattern.

### **The “Way” Based on Denial of Relevancy**

But if the relation of the Word of God to the life of learning is only of the nature of an appendix or adjunct, of an extra or added something, a *donum superadditum*, for instance; well, then, of course, we are free to follow the easier course of adaptation, of adjustment, of accommodation to the world of culture that is the product of the last centuries of modern western man’s cultural labors, the world that we find in our Canadian or, more broadly, North American surroundings. But then it will not be the faith that unites us in a fellowship in our academic work, but rather the work in which we are engaged as scholars. Then we shall, each for each, be busied with whatever light our fields are pleased to surrender to us. Our ultimate loyalty in our work will now be to the profession itself, to the mind or method of our profession. The one will be busy to take on the “mind” of the philologist; another, the “mind” of the lawyer; yet another, the “mind” of the engineer; and still another, the “mind” that is concerned, say, with the Hebrew Old Testament (and its world). Here our loyalty, in our respective fields of learning, will not be to God’s Kingdom of

Righteousness. But that cannot be; that is certainly in conflict with the Scriptural idea. For Christ is our Righteousness, and the Kingdom of Righteousness exists only where in Him, through the renewing operation of God's Holy Spirit, men have come to love the Truth as it is in Jesus, the Lord.

If God's Word therefore has no intrinsic connection with the world of learning, we shall never have the exhilarating joy of working together as members of Christ's Body to bring to manifestation in our studies patterns of God's glorious Kingdom. Left to us then is only to fall, as so many distinct individuals – centers of rationality, perhaps? – into the existing programs of the several secular universities, professional and technical schools. ("Secular" here means just exactly that science shines by its own light and thus has no need of any supposed light of faith.) In the wider sense of our question it means that we are left to fall into the prevailing order and practice – except, of course, where that is too glaringly immoral, or unjust, or ugly, etc.! – of Canadian and, indeed, North American society with all its implementing agencies, and to do it, if we would not be fools, with all possible dispatch.

The spirit that informs modern western society, Canadian and American society, will then come over us.

### **Each “Way” Demands Whole of Life**

Let us not comfort ourselves by saying that our Reformed Churches, our youth societies, etc. will yet be left to us. If in our search for truth we put our confidence in our “Reason” and the subjection of all things to the rational inquiry of men, we have changed entirely, as men. At first, we may for a time be able to hold on to some division of our life into what historically have been called the areas of faith and of reason. But life is integral; it is all one piece. And sooner or later we shall, if we are straight-forward and do not, through failure to face reality, become stunted in our growth, have to face up to the decision whether Christ’s Kingdom is a matter of the totality of our life, or the Kingdom of Reason. Whether the reality of our world is rooted in the heart of man, who, standing in Christ the Redeemer, is to render obedience to the Sovereign and who has his great reward in thus keeping God’s Law, or whether reality is simply something that is

just there, having in it some capacity to be searched out by a Light of Reason that is just there. Both are faiths men live by. But all faith is totalitarian. And sooner or later the one will destroy the other.

### **The Decision**

Let us make no bones about it: before us, as before Herakles, two ways lie and we must decide which one we will take, the way of accommodation to the present patterns of our world, i.e. the Way of Synthesis, or the Way of Antithesis. Again, let me remind you of what I said about Groen van Prinsterer's "In our isolation lies our strength." The Antithesis is not to be taken in a subjectivistic sense, as though *I* am different from him; it is not some static division of society into Christian and anti-Christian groups or segments of the populace. Rather, the Antithesis is the difference of response to the Word of God, which, coming into the world as a revealing light for our life (Ps. 119:105), effectuates with the sovereignty of its Divine Author an abiding line of division between ways obedient and disobedient (cf. Psalm 1; Prov. 1 and 2).

### **Synthesis, or Antithesis?**

Lo, what issues hang in the balance! I can scarcely refrain from attempting a look into the future. What kind of a Canada will emerge? What will be the nature of her institutions? What direction will her Common Law take? In what channels will her scientific investigations run? And will there be everywhere only the dead uniformity of secular rationalism, or will there have grown the realistic recognition of the role of principles in all our human life, and of the undeniable fact that we do not all follow the same Lord? Are not all directed by the same Rule (Word)?

But no more of this. In this sense, the future is not "clear." There is, as yet, no future Canada. Of this one thing we can all be very sure: the kind of Canadian society that will emerge will depend largely on you, the Reformation youth of Canada, and on the answer you give to the question I have just described as the Great Divide.

## 2

# THESIS

### *Lecture 1*

*September 1959*

THUS FAR WE HAVE stated two possible attitudes towards the question as to the intrinsic connection between the Word of God and the world of learning. Now I should like to add that it would seem clear that our choice between them will depend, does depend on what the Word of God actually is. Whatever uncertainty there may yet be among us on the matter will undoubtedly be due to our not being sufficiently clear as to the nature of the Word of God and as to the role it must play in our life. The first question, therefore, to which I wish to address myself in these lectures, is the question as to the nature and role of the Word of God.

### **The Crux of Our Problem**

What, after all, is the Word of God? It may at first strike you as strange that this question has to be asked, particularly in our circles. Was the Protestant Reformation not first of all a rediscovery of the meaning of the Word of God? And are we not all agreed as to the meaning of that Word? I believe, however, that further reflection will convince all of us that we are here at the heart of our problem and of the cause of whatever dividedness there may be as to how we should go. I think that we shall find that for various reasons – including the too great prominence that has been given even in the history of the Reformed Churches to theology at the expense of the prophetic task, that each believer has as man to understand the Divine Word – even we Christians of the Reformation very frequently have an inadequate understanding of the Word of God.

### **Word and Words**

To be sure, we are familiar with this book, the Bible or the Holy Scriptures, a collection of sixty-six books written by many authors to whom the Word of the Lord came in diverse ways. But to know



about this diversity of fact is not in itself to know the Word of God. Among my old “fundamentalist” friends there were those who could tell you at the drop of a hat how many chapters, even verses, nay, even words there are in this collection of sixty-six books (at least in the King James Version!). Yet that is not in itself a knowledge of the Word of God. I know many persons who can tell you in the space of a lightning flash where a certain expression is to be found, chapter and verse. Now we certainly need also in this way to be thoroughly acquainted with the Bible, but even such knowledge is not yet the required knowledge of the Word of God. I have known people, converted in evangelistic meetings, who are at once instructed in so-called methods of personal evangelism, i.e. in ways of handling particular Bible verses to meet various types of objection to the call for a complete “surrender” to Christ. Now I would not for a moment want to disparage the learning of specific Bible verses and their use in soul-winning. In our present discussion I only mean to say that such acquaintance with diverse parts and moments of the Scriptures is not by itself the knowledge of the Word of God that we must

have. It has been pointed out that it was of the experts in the Jewish law, the “*nomikoi*,” that Jesus said (Luke 11:52): “You have taken away the key to knowledge.” It is thus possible to be very much at home in the details of the Scriptures and not to know the Word of God.

### **The Unity of the Word**

For the Word of God is one. Underlying all the diversity of the Scriptures as we have them in this temporal life is the unity of the Word of God. It is, after all, the WORD. How else could this big collection of sixty-six books be properly spoken of as the Word? And whence the “system” of systematic or dogmatic theology? It is not the mind of the theologian, going to work on the many texts of Scripture, that constructs for the first time out of many passages a unity of meaning. This unity the theologian does not make; he *finds* it. The Divine Word is one, and as such is the POWER, living and active, that pierces to the heart and converts the soul (Rom. 1:16; Hebr. 4:12; Ps. 19:7; James 1:18; cf. I Cor. 1:18, 24). In the very first place, it is not we who come with our understanding to the

Word of God (taken, for example, in the sense of the collection of many logical judgments or, if you will, propositions making up our Scriptures), but it is the WORD, which is the POWER of God, that comes to our hearts and opens our eyes so that we may understand the singleness of meaning of all the many Scriptures. This Word comes to us not as theologians but as men and directs all our life-activities, including those we call theological. Our knowledge of the Word does not come from the application of a grammatical-historical exegetical method. For a man can read the Scriptures with a covering before his eyes (2 Cor. 3:14-16). In our exegesis or effort at getting at the meaning of this or that passage of the Bible, the Word is or is not already at work. God is first with our souls, also here, and there is no sure ground for our lives in our methods. The Word of God is the only firm foundation of our life. A proper understanding of the Scriptures is only possible when we are already in the grip of the Word, the active, renewing Word of God.

Just as the Scriptures are the Word of God written, so Christ is the Word of God come in the flesh.

For that reason, we may say that Christ is the meaning, the unity of the Scriptures. Thus, we read of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch that "...Philip began with that very passage of Scripture" – viz. Isaiah 53 – "and told him the good news about Jesus." When, however, we say that Christ is the meaning of the Scriptures, we must know what we are saying. In a moment I shall come back to this matter of the unity of the Word of God. But first let me suggest a number of ways in which our own Reformed practices may work to hinder our understanding of it.

### **Hindering Factors**

Take, for example, our family devotions. In the American fundamentalist circles in which I was brought up, personal reading of the Bible was very much encouraged, but Scripture reading in the family circle at mealtime was next to unknown, at least in the actual practice. When I first became acquainted with the latter practice, I was very much impressed with it. And I must say that I still feel that it is a most important factor in a Christian family life. (We are not just a collection, an aggre-

gate of individuals!) But this, I think, ought also to be said, that if the reading at table is merely of a few verses out of a chapter, to be followed the next day by the following few verses, and if there is no connecting comment, and no other Bible reading being done – as I fear is frequently the case – then it is scarcely to be wondered at that we do not know the Scriptures as a single Word. For where are we ever confronted with such a Word?

Or again, take our methods of catechizing. How often do we get lost in subdivisions of subdivisions? Do we place the lesson for the day in a wider perspective? When are all the “parts” brought together to reinforce in our consciousness the unity of the Word?

Perhaps most important of all here is the practice of preaching in our churches. In how many of the sermons preached in our pulpits are we confronted with the Word, and not merely with some of the words of the Word? To be specific, what, after all, is wrong with taking some Biblical person, say Peter, and analyzing for the congregation his good and bad qualities, thus with moralizing sermons? What is wrong with preaching on lessons to be

learned from incidents in the life of Christ, with delivering a homily on the virtue of love in 1 Cor. 13 taken out of all connection with the totality of Scripture and the history of redemption? Is not the evil in all these instances that we have failed to keep our eyes fixed upon the unity of the Word?

The point is important enough to take the time to offer you two examples of what I mean from sermons preached within the last year in Christian Reformed pulpits. One sermon dealt with the story of Elisha's healing Naaman of his leprosy (2 Kings 5), and there were six points: (1) Rich men as well as poor men have their troubles (the leprosy of Naaman); (2) Big results come from small things (the little Israelite servant girl succeeded in having the rich man of Syria go to the King of Israel); (3) Young people should study religion (the servant girl was acquainted with the man of God, Elisha, and his miracles); (4) Knowledge is of value when it's put to practical use (the servant girl knew the prophet was in Israel, but she also thought to mention it at the proper moment); (5) Men sometimes apply for help to the wrong sources (Naaman went to the King instead of to the prophet, to the government

instead of to the Church); and – finally! – (6) The messages of God are appointed to show to men the way of salvation (Naaman is carried from healing to Healing). There you have the sermon. Now let me ask you in all seriousness, precisely how did this sermon direct the congregation to the meaning of 2 Kings 5 in the Divine Word? How can congregations that are subjected to such “preaching” know the Word of God?

The second sermon is in many ways better than the first, but on the point at issue perhaps no different. The sermon was based on Jeremiah 29. The Jews had at last been carried away by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon – even the king, the queen and the court. And now Jeremiah is instructed by “the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel” to send a letter to “those whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon.” Here the people of God’s choice, because of their continuing disobedience and hardness of heart, have at last experienced the wrath of the sovereign God Who had made the covenant with them. Now they are driven from the land of promise, dispersed among the heathen. Is this the final abandonment? Is this the meaning of

all the promises to Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob? Is this the nature of Jehovah? What could their God have to say to them now? To hear the message is to be still from amazement. "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease... When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you... and will bring you back from captivity... and gather you from all the nations..." (Jeremiah 29:5-14).

What is the Word of God here but a revelation of God's faithfulness in this critical portion of history to His sovereignly given covenant-word? Yet the sermon took the words of vs. 13 out of their context and dealt with "Prayer in the Life of the



Christian.” The context of vs. 13 was simply used as illustrative material for a general truth. I suppose that just about everything that was said in the sermon was in its way scriptural. But was this sermon preaching the Word in these words? I dare to say, No. The text was dealt with abstractly (that is, torn out of its place) and not concretely. But then our final verdict must be that the Word at this place in the Scriptures was not preached. And I believe that all such preaching, for all its remaining good qualities, is essentially unsound, and does not build up in the congregation a rich and meaningful knowledge of the Word of God.

### **The One Word of God**

Well, we have seen now some practices that hinder our coming to know the Word of God in its unity. We must return to our main point, that the Word is such a unity. Is it possible to make clearer, and perhaps more vivid, what we mean by this unity of the Word? I think that it is. But it will take a little time to do it.

The Word of God – the POWER we have been talking about – works in us a true knowledge of

God, of our own selves and of the Law-order of God (the world-order). But these three “knowledges” are not three pieces of knowledge quite independent of each other; they are related.

### **God and Law**

Take, for instance, our knowledge of God and our knowledge of the Law. I should explain that by Law here I do not merely mean the Ten Commandments, the concentrated religious meaning of which Christ expressed in the words “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... and your neighbor as yourself.” In addition to this religious law for the central heart-life of man, I mean all those law-words of God that hold for the various aspects of persons and things, and of which we become aware in the actual living of our lives: mathematical laws, physical laws, laws for organic growth, laws of thought, economic and aesthetic laws, etc. We become aware of these laws as a binding or limiting force in our lives, as a force that holds for us and norms our lives: we do something; then we feel that it was not “good” and we draw back. In short,

I mean by Law every word of God by which He has subjected the creation to His Will or Rule. Law is thus nothing other than the Will of the sovereign God for His creation. But for that very reason it is not possible to have a true knowledge of the Law apart from a true knowledge of God as sovereign Creator.

Think of the Greeks. As pagans they knew no sovereign God. Whatever gods they did acknowledge were thought of as subject to a more ultimate law of Necessity which they called "*Anangke*." Thus, in their conception Law had become abstract, i.e. torn from its place in a larger context or structure. It was just simply there, some necessary force that determines everything. Being abstract, it has become absolutized. In the realistic philosophy of Plato such absolute, abstract law-essences – e.g. "the beautiful itself," "the just itself," etc. – hold for the gods as well as for men. Such an absolutization of the Law at the expense of God is but one of the many distortions of the Truth that are characteristic of man in apostasy.

Unfortunately, this abstract, pagan way of conceiving the Law was adopted by many philosophers

of the so-called Christian Middle Ages. We hear of the Law of Reason (!) and of Natural (!) Law. The radical departure from it that we meet in William of Occam is not a return to a scriptural view of Law. For Occam God and Law are irreconcilables. Law implies universals; Occam was a nominalist, and for nominalism only individual things really (i.e., in re) exist. Law therefore can only be individual decisions of God's Will. If God is to be free, He cannot be related to any universally binding Law. God is *ex-lex*, *Deus Exlex*. There can be no universally valid moral law to which God is subject.

Calvin puts us on the track of a scriptural conception of Law when he: (1) criticizes Augustine's theory of ideas (those are that abstract Law of Platonic realism, which in the intervening period between Plato and Augustine had been subjectivized, i.e. declared to be the *a priori* equipment of Reason, thus an abstract Law now attached to our own human subjectivity as its *a priori* part) by saying that God is not bound by any Law, but (2) at the same time rejects the Occamist view of the *Deus Exlex* and points to the scriptural account of God as faithful. In Calvin, the sovereignty of God is never

conceived apart from His righteousness (*justitia*). Calvin teaches that God by nature loves righteousness and justice. And that is simply his way of giving expression to the scriptural idea that God puts the Law to the creation and faithfully maintains it. By now it ought to have become clear to you that a scriptural view of the Law is intimately tied up with a scriptural view of the Divine Law-Giver. Law is related to God, and therefore our knowledge of the Law is related to our knowledge of God Himself.

### **God and Self**

But now – we must be getting on – likewise, a true knowledge of our own selfhood can only be had in connection with a true knowledge of God. Calvin brings out one aspect of this relationship at the opening of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>1</sup> But actually, the correlativity of self-knowledge and God-knowledge is involved in the scriptural declaration that man was created in the image

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1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *The Library of Christian Classics*, vol. xx (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

of God.<sup>2</sup>

All through the many centuries of western philosophic reflection men have repeatedly come back to this question of the Self, yet without much success. Man feels himself to be a radical, integral unity, but he cannot quite lay his hand on what that “sensed” unity is. The very popular contemporary British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, has summed up his reflection on the matter in this way:

Thus, in some sense it would seem we must be acquainted with our Selves as opposed to our particular experiences. But the question is difficult, and complicated arguments can be adduced on either side. Hence, although acquaintance with ourselves seems probably to occur, it is not wise to assert that it undoubtedly does occur.<sup>3</sup>

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2. By all means read Herman Dooyeweerd’s lecture “What Is Man?” in his volume *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960).
  3. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 51.

Not a very rewarding result for all the thought and energy that have gone into the discussion!

Yet it is no wonder that men cannot fathom the deep mysteries of the Self. For they have treated the matter as though it were a philosophical question, or, more recently and particularly in America, a question of the so-called behavioural sciences (which the latter it certainly cannot be, as William Barrett has recently demonstrated<sup>4</sup>). It is, however, a religious question and can only be answered in the religious way. The Word of God, operating as a POWER in our hearts, reveals God to us, but also our own selfhood in its radical, integral unity. Just as God is revealed as the Creator, the absolute and integral Origin of all things Who knows, and can have no second Origin – e.g. Matter – over against or in addition to Himself (this in contrast with all the various types of dualism: the Gnosticism of the first Christian centuries, the Manichaeans of the time of Augustine of Hippo, the Cathari of the medieval church, etc.), so man, created in His image, is

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4. William Barrett, *Irrational Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962). This book you should all certainly read.

revealed to himself in the religious root-unity of his creaturely existence (the “heart”). However much diversity there may be in his life, that can never be construed as a diversity of two fundamentally different kinds, i.e. as the “being” of two “worlds” that have nothing whatsoever to do with each other (e.g. MATTER – What is that? Never mind! – and MIND – What is that? No matter!), but must rather be “seen” as so many aspects of his central and integral religious being. Man is not a spirit that serves God and also a body belonging to the “world” of Galilean physics (and alien to the God-relation); man is a servant of God in his entirety, with nothing left over. In singleness of heart man is to serve God. In him there is the same integrality that there is in the God Whom he images.

I am tempted here to expand, and also to go on and show how in the various thinkers there is a striking parallel between the view of God they develop and their view of the human self. But there is no time for it now. The point that has engaged us here, you will remember, is that our knowledge of God and our knowledge of our own selfhood are not two independent “knowledges”; they are related.



## **Law and Self**

In the third place, there is a relation between our knowledge of Law and our knowledge of our own selves, and that, again, because Law and Self are related.

Luther, educated in the Occamist tradition, was inclined to put the freedom of the Christian man over against Law. To be in Christ is to be free, but to be free is to be freed from the Law, lifted up to the higher plane where Love reigns. There is in this life a voluntary submission to the laws of the state, for example, in accordance with the divine command, but essentially the man in Christ is freed from the Law. Gospel and Law exclude each other even where the Christian attempts to permeate the world of law with the love of the Gospel.

In the Bible, contrariwise, Law is not something of an inferior nature, not something to be freed from, but just the very condition of our existence as selves. One can think abstractly about freedom, and many do; in fact, it is the curse of the modern world. R.B. Kuiper, one-time chairman of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary and later president of Calvin Seminary, used the illustration

of the – slightly peculiar – old lady who went to visit a friend. When her hostess disappeared into her kitchen for a few minutes, this peculiar lady got up out of her chair and, walking about the salon, found a bowl of tropical fish behind the grand piano. In a sudden inspiration she reached her hand into the bowl, lifted out one of the fish and dropped it tenderly onto the rich carpeting that covered the floor. As she did so she muttered to herself, “Wicked old woman, keeping you shut up in that little old bowl! I’m going to give you the freedom of this whole salon.” Of course, the fish promptly proceeded to expire. Why? Because it had been removed from that law-area for which it had been created. And so it is also with man: he can be free to live as man only when he is in the Law-environment for which he was created. That “environment” is the full range of the divine Law for creation, which is every law-word that proceeds from the mouth of God. In this sense the Law is the condition of man’s freedom.<sup>5</sup>

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5. On this you must read the fundamental discussion of Herman Dooyeweerd in his *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vols., trans. David Freeman and William Young (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian

The world-order is thus an order of law, a law-order; the Law holds everywhere. It holds also for man; indeed, man is embedded in it. Law is everywhere the indispensable condition of life, the all-encompassing context of our lives. Notice that in Romans 7:12, 14, Paul calls the Law holy, righteous, good and spiritual. If the creation is good, so is the Law.

It is only when we are not in a right relation to the Law that we feel Law as a curse, as something that binds and limits us in a way that is undesirable, something that takes away our freedom. But then we must not condemn the Law, but convert ourselves. Read again Romans 7:14ff. And we must acquire a true view of freedom. When we sing the well-known hymn “Free from the law, O happy condition,” we are not declaring ourselves free from the Law of God as the Law-structure of the creation. That would be revolution, pure and simple. We must remember the second line of the hymn: “Jesus has bled, and there is remission.” And perhaps even more pointed is the hymn that begins:

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and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969), vol. I, pp. 511-523.

“Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free; force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.”

In the course of modern philosophy there have been those who stressed Law so much (actually, absolutized it) that the Self disintegrated into a mere law-function. Take the great metaphysical systems of the seventeenth century, which looked to mathematics and physics for their model. On the other hand, the romantics who reacted against such a way of thinking so absolutized the Self (the Genius is the Law; when Mozart plays, that is the Law for musical production) that Law dissolved into the functioning of the human subject. Scripture, however, shows us the integral relation of Law and Self. Man is placed in the sphere of the Divine Law. When he does not maintain his right relation to the Law, he becomes un-righteous. Christ, the second Adam, keeps the whole Law (man must live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God) perfectly. His righteousness is declared to be that of God's people (justification), and is actually worked into their lives through the operations of the Holy Spirit (sanctification). Man becomes righteous again, and

knows the Law as good. Without a true in-sight into the relation of Law and Self, or Subject, one cannot understand the Christian religion.

Sometimes one runs across something of an insight into the real relation of Self and Law in quite unexpected places. In his book, *Modern French Literature*, Denis Saurat writes as follows about the difference between nineteenth and twentieth century French literature:

The conception of a moral law has disappeared. Mallarme and Baudelaire rebelled against the moral law because there was one... For Gide, Proust, Valery, Malraux, Montherlant there is no law. There is no thrill in breaking the law... *Le moi* (the Self) also has disappeared. *Le Culte du moi* of Barres' early work no longer means anything. There is no *moi*. Proust's Marcel does not know what his *moi* is – and does not care. Perhaps *le moi* was connected with the law, formed itself, as in Corneille, in submitting to the law, or, as in Baudelaire, in rebelling against it. But now, no law and no *moi*.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Denis Saurat, *Modern French Literature: 1870-1940* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1946), p. 79.

We can only add: just so!

### **One Insight**

I think we have now discussed the relations of God, Law, and Self, sufficiently for our present purposes, and we have seen that our knowledge of these three is not a matter of three separate “knowledges.” These “knowledges” are related. In the light of our discussion, however, I think we can now go a step farther and say that a true knowledge of the three comes as one insight. It is not that we make analytical corrections in one “item” and then go on to adjust the other two, or any such thing. This knowledge is a knowledge of the “heart,” the religious concentration point of our existence; it comes in a single flash of insight; it brings us world-orientation and thus sets our lives going in the right direction (cf. Ps. 86:11 and Ps. 25:12-14).

Permit me a rather simple illustration of what I mean. Let us suppose that Christ Himself should suddenly appear visibly in His glory right here in this room. You know what would happen. Each one of us would be down on his knees. We would be vividly aware of three things: (1) that this Person

is the Sovereign Lord; (2) that we are nothing in ourselves over against Him, but solely and wholly His servants; (3) that His Word is our Law. In effect we would be saying, “Speak, Lord; for your servant hears,” and in that response of our hearts the three “knowledges” of which we have been speaking are found: (1) Lord (God); (2) your servant (self); (3) speak... hears (the Law-word). Such knowledge is not analytical knowledge, with its multiplicity of items and processes; it is a single insight, present in the religious depth-level of our existence previous to all analysis. It comes when we are confronted with the Word of God.

The Word of God is the POWER by which God opens our hearts to see our human situation in the framework of the whole of reality. This is to know the Truth. And to know the Truth is wisdom; for the fear of Jehovah, you will remember, is the starting point of wisdom. Possessed of wisdom, we know how to live out our lives. We have the *regula* or principle by which to direct our goings.

But the Word of God does more. We are not only made aware of our place in the creation, but we are also convicted of our sin. In the presence of

Christ, we know not merely that we are nothing but servants; we know also that we are *unworthy* servants, not in part, but wholly. And, further, we know the total redemption of Christ. In a flash, we know our place, that we have (in the first Adam) fallen from our place, and that in the second Adam, we are restored to our place (though only in Him). It is not true that only part of us is fallen (e.g. the bodily passions), because there are no “parts.” The *integrality* of the creation (particularly in the heart of man) brings with it the radical character of the Fall. In the Fall of man all created reality was directed away from the service of God. But it is also true that in the saving work of Christ, in the heart of man, all the creation is redirected to the service and glorification of God.

I hope that the foregoing discussions will have served to elucidate what we mean when we say that the Word of God is the POWER that works in us an existential awareness of the integral creation-order and (within that Order) of the radical Fall and the radical restoration in Christ. Now, perhaps, we can begin to understand how the Word of God is centrally relevant for all our learning. For in our



learning, we are everywhere confronted not only with a great diversity of states of affairs, but with an Order of states of affairs. Facts do not “speak” to us unless we see them in their Order. In one way or another the scholar must have an Order in his findings. If the Word of God does not teach him what this Order is, he must substitute some principle of total-structuration of his own devising. Now in opposition to all such principles of human devising (about which we shall speak in the next lecture) the Word of God posits the Truth. It is the Divine Thesis, of which all human substitutes can be only so many Distortions.



# 3

## ANTITHESIS

### *Lecture 2*

*September 1959*

YESTERDAY IT WAS THESIS; today it is Antithesis. Before I finish today, I shall have to clarify the sense of the word “antithesis” as I am using it here. First, however, a quick review of how far we have come is in order, I think. Recapitulation, as one of the men present yesterday reminded us, is important. I should like therefore to recapitulate very briefly what I tried to say in the first lecture, but in the process, I may just add to what I said then. This is to say that my purpose is not merely to recapitulate, but rather by means of the recapitulation to get us all back on the track of thought of these lectures.

### **The Word and the World of Learning**

You will recall that I began yesterday by describing two fundamentally diverging ways the Dutch Calvinist immigration in Canada could take, and that I then proposed that the way you ultimately would go would be determined by whether or not you have seen clearly the inner connection that exists between the Word of God and our life in this world, more particularly just now the intrinsic connection between that Word and the world of learning. The first thing that had to occupy our attention therefore was the question, just what, precisely, is the Word of God? To see that clearly is the first requirement for really seeing the need of Christian action in our society and of a Christian center of higher studies and research on this North American continent.

I have a little hope that already many of you are beginning to be able to picture to yourselves, at least in some tentative way, how the land appears to us to lie. But today's lecture ought to help greatly in fixing that picture in your minds.

We saw that the Word of God in all its many words is yet one Word in that as a POWER oper-

ating upon our hearts it reveals to us, in the twinkling of an eye, God Himself, our own self, and the world-order, the cosmos of God's creation-ordinances in which we have been placed to serve God before His face in single-hearted covenantal obedience and love. It is as though the Word (Voice) of God addresses us: "Adam," "Samuel," YOU (fill in your own name), and at once we know the whole Truth. With Samuel we say, "Speak, Lord; for your servant hears." That is, You are the LORD; Your word is the law; I am nothing but Your servant. I am, further, an unworthy servant, but You have called me back to service. Thus the Word of God reveals at once our total human situation, not merely the situation as given in the order of creation, but also, within that situation, our Fall from our Place in the cosmos as imaging vicegerent – "Adam, where are you?" – and our complete and glorious Restoration to it in Jesus Christ, the second and substitutionary Adam.

The Word of God is thus God's Word of Truth about the ultimate nature of things: (i) who we men are (our "heredity"); (ii) in what kind of location we have been put by God (our "environment"); (iii)

what, in the light of the previous two, we have to do (i.e. how to walk in the Truth). As such POWER the Word of God is God's THESIS, the first and only True Statement, by which the nature of our life in the world is elucidated and its way (thus) directed.

Here then we found that *oneness* of the Word of God. In our thinking and speaking about that Word we are required to think successively a number of thoughts and use a multiplicity of words. We can never quite reach the unity, cannot put our fingers solidly on it, as is also the case with our thinking about our own selfhood. The unity is just beyond our logical grasp; yet religiously we are aware that the unity is there. By means of this converting Word, this Word that begets us to new life, the sovereign, the living God takes hold of us in the religious heart or concentration point of our existence and sets us in the Truth, i.e. in Christ.

### **The Meaning of Truth**

I must add right here that all this is of fundamental importance for our understanding the meaning of the word "truth." We had some debate about that

word yesterday, you will remember. It comes up repeatedly in my classes at Calvin too. I am constantly being asked, Is not  $2 + 2 = 4$  a “truth”? Is not the fact that the combining of one chemical element with another produces uniformly a certain kind of chemical combination a “truth”? To all such questions I reply that we must distinguish between a more or less correct description of those limited states of affairs that immediately press upon us all and the truth about those states of affairs. The truth of them cannot be seen in isolation from the whole coherence of meaning of the creation-order as seen in the light of God’s Word. It is important to remember in this connection that we must always be “normed” by Scripture, and Scripture tells us what the Truth is. The Word of God is God’s Word of Truth (Jas. 1:18). Christ is the Word of God, and the Truth. Scripture commands us to stand in the Truth, to stand in Jesus Christ. And that is, of course, our norm. When we talk about the Truth we must remember that Truth in the Scripture is not some discrete (cut off, separate, abstracted from the totality) observation of positively given phenomena, such a notion of “truth” as nineteenth

century positivism defended and handed on to phenomenology. Truth in the Scripture has to do with the whole of reality in its central religious meaning. Only the Word of God by which we are ingrafted into Christ can set us in the Truth!

### **Removing Possible Misunderstandings**

This is probably the place, before we go on to new material, to attempt to remove a couple of possible misunderstandings with respect to the development of our thought thus far. First, then, one of the ministers who was present yesterday asked, after my lecture, whether I had given proper emphasis to the Church, and especially to the fact that we come to the Word of God through the Church. Now, of course, the Church and its proclamation of the Word of God is of primary importance in the dynamic development of the Kingdom of God, and it is certainly true that it is through the presence of the Church in the world that we come to hear the Word of God. But in these lectures, I am concerned with the transcendence of the Word of God. It is the Word that is first. The confessing Church is one manifestation of the Body of Christ, but the



Body of Christ (Kingdom of God) is just that Body of believers, that Fellowship, that Community of faith that the Spirit gathers by the Word. We must never forget that God's work in the heart is first; God establishes His Church by His Word. That is why it was not necessary for me in the present context to speak particularly of the Church.

A second misunderstanding that might possibly have arisen in your minds concerns my statement that the central thrust of the Word of God is the revelation of: (1) an (integral) Creation; (2) the (radical) Fall; and (3) the (equally radical) Restoration in Jesus Christ. In the Netherlands, Prof. Dr. C.A. van Peursen in his book *Filosofische Oriëntatie*<sup>1</sup> has raised the objection to this procedure that any such statement as to the central thrust of the Bible is itself the result of our own human, thus fallible, exegesis or effort at interpretation, subject therefore to all the relativity of historical and theological influences out of the past, and that other persons, from a different perspective, can just as well suggest some other formulation. He mentions,

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1. Cornelis van Peursen, *Filosofische Oriëntatie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1958), p. 132.

for one, the Kingdom of God as a possibility.

To this I should like to answer, first, that I cannot see how Van Peursen's suggestion that someone might put over against our formulation that of the Kingdom of God can do anything but establish and confirm what we have said here. For if we stop for one minute to reflect on the idea of the Kingdom of God, we find that it is the Kingdom of men redeemed in Christ. And that means that God in Christ has caused man, who fell in the whole of his being from his representative place or office, to stand once again, that is, to stand righteous (in Christ, of course) in the entire Law-order of God. Thus, the Kingdom itself requires for its understanding the central theme of integral Creation, radical Fall and radical Restoration. That is the Kingdom, the Kingdom of the renewed Righteousness of God.

But, second, and more basic, we must, I repeat, get away from the notion that the Bible is simply a communication to this "world" objectively (i.e. not impinging on me, the subject) of a body of judgments to which I, man, come with my apparatus for rational understanding. By His Word, God begets us to a new life. By His Word, He attach-

es us to the Truth. Suddenly we “see” the nature of the real. We “see” the universe at its heart to be that great covenantal commerce between God and His image and vicegerent, man, who, in the whole of that Sure Order of Law, that is the creation, is to walk in holiness before his God, making all his cultural work in the creation (established by the cultural mandate) to correspond with the demands of the divine law-ordinances and thus to be his religious service to God. (Study Rom. 12:1 in the light of its context, i.e. preceded by ch. 11 and followed by ch. 13.) We “see” ourselves as integral (i.e. that there is no remnant that is not concentrated in this covenantal relation) in an integral creation-order (i.e. no second principle such as Matter over against, alien to, not concentrated upon God through man in his integral heart-service). From the standpoint of Scripture there can be no Being (matter or substance) that is not related to, concentrated upon this covenantal center of reality. There can be no “qualities” in themselves, that are not seen as related to man’s cultural-religious service in the Covenant. There can be no “image” of God in man apart from his total representative place. It is

extremely important that we leave off all the old orthodox-scholastic notions of the image of God as being related to some substance, some rational substance in me, some structural thing that is to be found in all men. I should like to suggest a book for you to read on this subject, one of the volumes of G.C. Berkouwer's Studies in Dogmatics entitled *Man: The Image of God*.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Ordering Principle of Life**

It is, I think, becoming clearer as we go on with the lectures that the Word of God is indeed the ordering principle of our life, the principle that gives order to all our experience. We said yesterday, you will remember, that our question about the relation of the Word of God to our life in this world, including our life in the "world" of learning, is the question about principles. I said that we may sometimes have talked too abstractly about our principles. Our esteemed colleague here in this conference, Prof. Van Riessen, has said the same thing in his book *The*

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2. G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk Jellema (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1962).

*Society of the Future*, and he has said it very well.<sup>3</sup> It is one of the best statements about it I have ever read anywhere. Be sure to read especially his third and seventh chapters, entitled “Structural Principles of Society” and “The Liberation of Society” respectively. It is better to read the Dutch text, if you can, than the English (which sometimes misses the point even on central issues).<sup>4</sup> “Principle” is the Origin that orders, structurates. The Word of God, understood as the POWER of God that opens our hearts to the Truth, is thus the principle of our life.

Many so-called detailed problems will suddenly be illuminated when seen in connection with the central principle. Take, for instance, the problem of responsibility, closely related to the matter of man’s imaging God. Older thinkers, heavily influenced by alien (to Christianity) rationalistic ways of thinking, who accordingly took the image to be what

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3. Hendrik van Riessen, *The Society of the Future*, trans. and edited by David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957).
  4. Hendrik van Riessen, *De Maatschappij der Toekomst* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1952).

they called Reason, thus supposedly identifying the image with something in the structure of man considered separate from the *directedness* of his life to God, frequently thought of man's responsibility as following from his rationality. This is still today repeatedly being said by many Calvinist professors and thinkers. Man is rational, they argue. That is to say, he can distinguish by means of concepts differences in things. For that reason, he can also distinguish between right and wrong. And therefore, he is responsible. Constantly you will run across some such line of thought. But it is not true, as you can see as soon as you relate the question of responsibility to our central principle, the Word of God. From Scripture it should be clear that our human responsibility arises not from the fact that we have within us something called rationality, but just exactly from the central religious place we have in the Cosmos, God's representative in the Creation, put over against His face in the Covenant, made subject to His Law, given our human task to carry out in religious loving obedience. Of course, it is true that the rational or analytical aspect of our life is always present in our responsibility, but many other

aspects of our temporal life are also involved. Responsibility, however, is a matter not of one of these aspects but of the total situation in its religious concentration of meaning.

So much then to point up the power of the ordering principle to “place” and thus elucidate much that is often taken to be detailed questions. It is, indeed, in the light of our principle that we see the connection of all the details of our life. Christ, Kingdom of God, Righteousness, State, marriage, family, Covenant, Church, – how they all come together into a beautiful unity. I am sorry that we cannot here take the time to talk about it. At this point the Groen Club booklet *The Bible and the Life of the Christian* will, I think, be of great help to you.<sup>5</sup> It deals specifically with these topics.

### **God, Self and Cosmos. The Metaphysical Questions Par Excellence**

We must, however, be getting on to the material that belongs more particularly to our subject mat-

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5. H. Evan Runner, ed., *The Bible and the Life of the Christian* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968).

ter for today. And, now, the first thing that has to be pointed out is this, that from the beginning of western philosophical speculation, that speculation has centered about the three moments of God, Self, and the World-order, order of nature, Nature, or whatever you may wish to call it for the moment. I think it was Prof. Cornford in his book *From Religion to Philosophy*<sup>6</sup> who remarked about Thales – many have looked upon Thales (I think, incorrectly; cf. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*,<sup>7</sup> ch. 1) as the first of the Greek philosophers – that when he said that everything is full of gods and souls and that everything is water he was operating with the three core-conceptions of previous Greek religion: God, the Self, the World-order (the world all reduces to one stuff, water). These questions that philosophy inherits were religious questions, and, as we have seen, only in the religious way can the truth about them be known. Yet these very problems became the heart of philosoph-

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6. F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957).

7. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).



ical speculation, of what we know as metaphysics.

The history of metaphysical speculation can thus never be understood unless we see it as a new way of attempting to find answers to questions that really are religious. They are religious questions because we cannot properly formulate them or answer them except by being in a covenantal fellowship of life with God, except by being taken hold of in our hearts and set in the Truth. They became metaphysical questions when they were taken to be questions that can be answered by a supposed purely rational analysis of our temporal existence, considered an independent of the religious relation.

This *metaphysical* attempt to find answers to these questions lasted right down through the centuries until we arrive at Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>8</sup> In the section of that Critique called the Transcendental Dialectic, Book II, we find a discussion of the three questions of (1) a rational or speculative anthropology or psychology (the Paralogisms), the question of the "I" or Self; (2) a ra-

8. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1977).

tional or speculative cosmology (the Antinomies), the question of the world-order; and (3) a rational or speculative theology, the theistic proofs for the existence of God. Here we have the very heart of that Dialectic that became so important for the latter idealistic developments through Hegel. Kant wished to destroy metaphysics in this sense, so that any theoretical answers (theoretical in the sense of the scientific method of concept building) to these questions would be impossible. He proposed, however, a practical reason which was supposed to be able to help here. He had to do away with knowledge here, he himself wrote, in order to make a place for faith. But faith was for Kant a kind of moralistic reflection, not Christian faith. Many followers of Kant drew a different lesson from his writing; they followed the agnostic-phenomenalistic way: metaphysics is impossible, and since our three questions were by all men taken to be metaphysical questions, no answer to these questions could be expected.

There was something good in this agnostic reaction to Kant. These questions can never be solved in the metaphysical way. But this dead-end result did not drive men to see the Light of the Word of

God. The positivistic spirit took possession of the hearts of many men in the later nineteenth century in Europe, and has since become a mighty force in the academic center of the Anglo-Saxon world in the twentieth.

More recent decades are showing, however, that there was something about the metaphysical movement that cannot be denied man. Our life is a life lived in an Order, and awareness of the Order is necessary in order to possess a significant knowledge even of "facts." "Facts" unordered do not "speak" to us. Even when the true sense of the Order is not clear, the Order itself is there, and that as revelation impinging upon us, and it asserts itself and appears in a man's imaginings in some distorted form. For we men cannot escape our creation-situation as men: we are not analytical fact-recording machines; we are God's representatives in the earth, before God's face to know (in the Hebrew sense) and live in the Truth. We are that prophet-priest-king creature, fallen from our office in Adam or restored to it in Christ. This unavoidable creation-situation drives us to give an answer to the religious core-questions. Kant wanted to prove that metaphysics is impossi-

ble. Well, so it is. But the central questions of metaphysics we found to be in actuality religious questions (known aright only when we are in the firm grip of the Word of God), and as such they remain at the center of our human experience and insist on our prophetic-priestly-kingly response.

Understood in the above sense, metaphysics is always a human substitution for living a truly religious life. This is not to say, however, that there is no properly philosophical task. What it does mean is that there is no autonomous philosophical task, that is, one that is not directed from out of a deeper-lying religious level of our being.

### **The Nature of Sin and Grace**

The present step in advancing our argument is most important to notice. The Fall does not change our creation-situation. The cosmos of God's Will (Law) remains firm. Mankind remains bound to God in a covenantal relationship, and is guilty therein. That is the meaning of his life. The Fall is simply a change in the direction we give to our lives. God remains the Sovereign, but we no longer acknowledge Him as such. The Law abides sure, the holy and gracious

Law-word of our Creator-Lord for our life; we no longer bow under it as such. We men too continue to be nothing in ourselves; but we repress this and, cutting ourselves off in our imagining from the religious relation that is our true situation, we try to make ourselves to be something having its Ground in itself. A *substance*, for instance. Something that is just here, a Da-sein. The creation-meaning abides as faithful as the Word of God that called it into being and sustains it. We have to do something with it; it is all there is to do something with; there is no other reality than God's creation to be accounted for.

But having in our unrighteousness suppressed the Truth, we must imagine to ourselves (in our hearts) a Lie. An account of our total situation is inevitable because of our own nature. Thus, we devise (imagine, conjure up) some new principle of the total-structuration of our life-experience. That is the Lie which is not according to reality but is a figment of our imagination. The positive affirmation (God's Word, the Truth) is first, the THESIS. Our Lie is the placing of a repressing and supplanting statement over against God's True Statement.

The False Statement of ours is thus the Anti-thesis or ANTITHESIS. As Paul tells us in the first chapter of Romans, we men “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever blessed” (vs. 25). The result he describes in the next two verses (26, 27): our life-activities came to be directed against nature, i.e. against the cosmos of God’s Law-word.

The Restoration work of Christ is thus not an addition of Grace to a Nature that is just here (and in a natural or normal condition). God’s entire integral creation centers in man. When we men fell, the whole creation was turned by the heart of man away from its proper end or direction, viz. to glorify and serve the Creator. The Kingdom of Grace is the announcement that a new Head of the race has graciously been provided in the Second and Last Man. The Kingdom of God is the renewing of the heart. It is the new Righteousness. We men can stand once again in the Truth and “see” reality as it is. Consequently, we are brought back to an obedient bowing under the creation-ordinances.

In other words, grace does not complete nature (where nature is taken as a normal something not affected by Fall or Redemption internally), as Thomas Aquinas said and Roman Catholics believe. (We shall try to say more about this in our third lecture tomorrow.) Rather, grace renews nature. In the Kingdom of Grace, the creation norms are activated once again in the many relationships of life: parents and children, husband and wife, masters and servants, government and subjects. Right into the very heart of the Kingdom of Grace (the Church-institute) Christ maintains the creation-order.

### **Christ and the Creation-Ordinances**

It is important to emphasize this point today, when from Barthian and other crisis-theology circles we are told that we must proceed only from Christ, and that there can be no mention of creation ordinances. Let me bring forward at this moment only two examples of what I mean. First, the question of divorce. In Matthew 19 we read what Christ said to the Pharisees who asked Him about it to test Him. Christ refers them to creation: "Haven't you read... that at the beginning the Creator 'made

them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?'" The Pharisees strike back, you remember, and remind our Lord that Moses commanded to give a bill of divorce. To this Christ made reply, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." That is, the government (Moses) must take the condition of the people into consideration in the forming of its legislation; it must work in a "Christian-historical" way, as the Christian statesmen of the Netherlands have always said. But the proclamation of the Truth in Christ points back to the Law-demands of the creation-order.

A second example is what Paul says about women's wearing hats in the churches. His word is often relativized as simply a reference to the mores or customs of his day. But significantly that is not what Paul is doing. He grounds his argument in the creation-situation. According to the original ordinance of the Father, the woman does not stand on a par with the man. Read 1 Cor. 11:5-10, and compare 1 Tim. 2:9-15. For that reason, the



woman should not enter the congregation with uncovered head. Here again we have in the proclamation of Christ's Kingdom an appeal to the original creation-ordinance. It is for such reasons that the Kingdom can also be called Righteousness. For it is through the reign of Christ according to the Law of God that man is again restored to the proper relation to God and his fellow-men. Christ maintained the proper relation as Second Man: He stood righteous. His righteousness is accounted and made *our* righteousness in the Kingdom of Righteousness.

### **Antithesis as Systematic (Religious) Distortion of the Creation-Order**

But we must be getting back to the main point we were making. Even in the Fall we remain religious beings, possessed of some vaguely haunting awareness of our integral selfhood and of a cosmic law, as well as of God. Take the Self, for example. We have a sense that somehow all our life-activities come together into one, a oneness that is the "I," the *moi*, the Self. We simply cannot locate or identify any longer that root-unity of our lives to our own satisfaction, and so that we and others are

convinced. The meaning of the “I” escapes us. Yet we are somehow driven to keep on trying to fix it in a statement about what that deeper unity is. In other words, fallen man, just because he remains the religiously-bound creature God made him, does not simply act as a rational analyzer of “facts” that are positively presented to his senses or mind. As a religious being, he is driven to religious statements, to search for the totality of meaning and to make a statement about the unity of his selfhood.

We have already seen, however, that true self-knowledge arises only in a living fellowship with God. And it is that fellowship that fallen man has broken. He is now no longer in a position to see the great diversity of aspects of his temporal life as concentrated in the religious heart and directed to the Origin of his life. He worships the creature, removed in imagination from any relation to the Creator. He thinks of himself as just this thing here. But since this something that is just here, our temporal existence, exhibits a great diversity of moments or aspects—e.g. numerical, spatial, physical (kinematic), energetic, organic, psychical, analytical, historical-technical, lingual, social, eco-

nostic, aesthetic, jural, ethical and pistical—, and all of them, seen in the Light of the Word of God are relative aspects, components, of the religious root-unity (our life as a whole is religion) that is concentrated upon the worship of God, apostate man is driven by his religious needs to find a substitute to fill in for the true root-unity of his life he is religiously eluding, to absolutize one of the relative aspects or sides of our religious life and elevate it to the place of the heart. In doing this he is not, as you can see, merely picking up sense-images of reality on the blank tablet of his mind. He must find an absolute in the relative. We see him bound to the creation-structure: he must know himself. At the same time we see him wilfully substituting his Lie to replace the Truth. He must have his absolute, even if it means that he must distort what observation will readily disclose to be relative. His rational analysis is accompanied by the deeper drive, which in the fallen state requires a distortion of the very “facts” he is in the process of analyzing.

An immediately apparent example of what I am talking about is offered by the contemporary irrationalist attack upon the old rationalist theory

of man as Reason. “Reason” is actually an apostate concept; it is a myth. It arises from an absolutization and deification of our analytical capacity to distinguish difference conceptually. The apostate need for a “substantial” entity that is just there has taken hold of a relative function of our temporal existence (relative, because an analysis of our analytical-functional life discloses a multiplicity of moments in it that requires the other life-moments of our temporal existence in order to be) and distorted it into being a something, the central “thing” of our life. Rationalism assumed that the heart of man was Reason.

Yet this rationalistic account is actually wholly at variance with observable states of affairs – recent research in psychology, psychoanalysis, and of various social philosophers would seem to render highly dubious the existence of any such Reason as rationalism had assumed. We can note the change that has taken place by observing the changed meaning of the verb “to rationalize.” In earlier centuries “to rationalize” one’s conduct meant to bring forward the rational or logical grounds for it. Today “to rationalize” would more likely mean, at least in

many quarters, “to make to look rational what was done for ‘reasons’ that are really sub-rational, ‘reasons’ that lie in the dark fords and murky depths of the psychological life.” In other words, “rationalize” now refers more to a mask on the surface than to the central heart of man. In irrationalism, Reason has been removed from its supposed central position and made peripheral and relative. Of course, we may add that irrationalism in turn has taken some other relative aspect of our temporal existence that is no more central than the old “Reason” of the rationalists, and made it the “heart.”

### **Great Diversity of Antithesis**

Our illustration brings us to the next point, viz. that apostate men do not always agree on what they absolutize. This ought not to surprise us at all. Oneness of mind (or heart: concord), unity, community, peace, – these are the fruit of God’s uniting our hearts in a fellowship of faith by the POWER of His Word. Where men are not so bound, nothing is there to prevent their seizing first upon one and then upon another of the many aspects of our temporal life as being in their view the absolute

origin of the other aspects. This is made possible by the very relative character of each of the life-aspects: being relative, the other meaning-aspects of life are involved in their very nature. The wholeness of meaning is present universally in a certain way in each aspect. It requires but a distortion of this creation-structure to see one aspect as the fullness of meaning required for the heart of all the other meaning-aspects. I shall return to this yet obscure point next time.

So it is that a great diversity of Antitheses has arisen in the course of philosophical history. We have spoken of rationalism; but we know also an aestheticism, a materialism, an organicism, a technicism, and so on. Man has been conceived of as a rational being, as a material organization, as a technical being, as an economic being. You have probably heard the terms: man the machine, *homo faber*, *homo oeconomicus*, etc. These, and others I shall not take the time to mention, are all totality-views about man that arise not from a mere rational observation and analysis of positive facts presented to our “minds” – if that were so, conflict between them would be lacking – but rather from a failure

to see the relative aspects of our life as all relative, and from the consequent effort to explain all the remaining relative aspects in terms of one that is (religiously) lifted out or absolutized, and thus made the deeper source and unity of the others.

You will notice that for the several “theories” that thus arose we use these “-isms” words. These words always indicate distortion, exaggeration. We “feel” the distortion and speak of the theory as being one-sided. When this one-sidedness has been sufficiently felt a change may come to another theory. But in time it too proves to be one-sided. There never comes a resting-point, a satisfactory end to the search. Man does not find himself. So much is this the case that many modern men have made a virtue of the evil and said they would rather have an eternal search for the truth than have the truth in their possession. The latter, they pretend to themselves, is fit for the gods alone.

In these three lectures it is impossible to go into all these highly complicated matters. All I can hope to do is to be suggestive, to provide a certain stimulus for you to go and work more efficiently with the books that are available. Rush to the book table

at the back of the room after the lectures. The lectures ought to set you to reading important books. I can only hope to give you an initial momentum, as it were, to set you to the task for yourselves. Only then do you become a student.

The important thing in this Conference is that you begin to see how the Word of God really directs us in our analysis of our experience. What the Word of God does not do, of course, is to tell us that there are fourteen or so aspects, law-spheres, ways (modes, modalities) in which that which is, is. For that is strictly a matter of analysis. The Word directs us however to take whatever diversity of moments we find in the creation as a diversity of the integral fullness of meaning of our religious life. In this way the Word directs us to the integral creation-order concentrated in the heart of man, and at the same time liberates us from old Greek ways of interpreting our experience that in one modification or another have pretty largely kept their hold on us down to the present.

### **The Failure of Greek Thought**

For the Greeks never “saw” the integral structure of



the creation. How could they? Separated from the Sovereign God they missed any true knowledge of their own selfhood. They were lost in the functional diversity of this temporal life and had no awareness further of the religious depth-level of human existence; whatever they might think of themselves would have to be in terms of the temporal diversity.

A notable peculiarity of the Greek outlook is the way man and the world-order are seen as a conjoining or bundling together of a higher and a lower "world." This peculiarity seems to have arisen out of the religious-historical experience of the peoples in the Greek area. There seems to have been an earlier stratum of tradition that was characterized by a natural cult-religion (finding gods or divine powers in a sudden waterfall, a peculiar flight of birds, the explosive power of the acorn or some similar organic or physical phenomenon) with its correspondingly naturalistic-religious way of explaining man's life and the world in which he lives. A later movement then appears to have entered the scene with the Olympian deities, which are personalized cultural powers of man, and this tradition thinks of man, instead of in terms of his physical-organic

life, more as a cultural being (engaged in thought and technics, concerned with the beautiful and the good). These two traditions apparently slowly intermingled, the cultural conception being superimposed upon but only partially conquering the naturalistic conception. In man therefore “body” and “soul” stand for these two previous ways of conceiving man as a totality (each thus an apostate distortion of the integral nature of man), but in classical Greek thought, the two are brought together into an amalgam. Further, the “soul-concept” of the later cultural movement is thought of as closer to the nature of the (conquering Olympian) deities, as “superior,” of a higher ontic status, while the “body-concept” is thought of as “inferior.”

Thus we get the peculiar Greek division of everything into a higher “world” and a lower “world.” Remember that each of these “worlds” was originally an apostate distortion of the integral creation-order, arising from a lack of insight into the central religious meaning of the creation and resulting in the absolutization of a natural “aspect” or a cultural “aspect” of that creation-meaning. When the two have been brought together, and each relativized

with respect to the other, we are no closer to an insight into the root-unity of man's life or the integral meaning of the Cosmos of God.

In the Word of God, "body" cannot mean some lower or inferior "part" of me, opposed to the more god-like "soul." Such a conception is simply foreign to the Bible. Take, for instance, Romans 12:1. We are to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God. Surely that cannot mean that I am to present my inferior, more animal-like nature as a sacrifice of life unto God! No; in the Bible we hear of the whole man outwardly (the body) and the whole inner man-in-religious-concentration-up-on-his-Origin (the soul or heart). Paul speaks of the outward and inward man (2 Cor. 4:16). But each of these is the whole man. Such a view is governed by the basic religious motive of the Word of God: the integral creation, the radical (because of piercing to the integral root) Fall and Redemption, and is in antithetical relation to any Greek view of body and soul as a lower and higher "world."

### **The Influence of Apostate Principles**

Yet the Greek views of dichotomy and trichotomy

– some Greek philosophers added a “pneuma,” Latin, *spiritus*, above the *soma* (body) and *psyche* (soul) – entered the Christian church through the early Church Fathers, and represented such a powerful tradition of thought that few have ever escaped their clutches. Many Christians to this day, accepting a more or less Greek view of body-substance and soul-substance, are forever engaged with the problems associated with the names of traducianism and creationism. I do not know whether you are all aware of what these matters mean. Perhaps somewhere you have heard a discussion about whether and when God creates a soul and slips it into the procreated bodily substance, or whether the “soul-stuff” is passed along somehow with the “physical stuff.”

The Word of God shows all these problems to be pseudo-problems. They are not genuine problems. Yet think of the centuries of theological reflection that have been directed away from the central issues of the Word-revelation to these pseudo-problems! And of the devastating effect that the prominence given to such Hellenized theology has had upon the Church’s witness and catechizing and

preaching! And think of all the Christians through all the centuries who have come back in the western centers of academic work, come back time after time in their philosophical endeavours, in psychology, anthropology, and other sciences, to attempt still another solution for these pseudo-problems. Of course, their effort was always in vain, because the distorted formulation at the outset precluded their analytically probing the really existing states of affairs in the world. If you know anything of the history of the sciences, you know too well the unhappy situation that I am speaking about. How long we have allowed ourselves to be slaves to idols! But oh, the liberating POWER of the Word of God!

All the special sciences have been fundamentally affected by the mighty tradition of setting up a “world” of Matter (e.g. the so-called “world” of Galilean physics) over against another “world” of the Mind; a “world” of brute “facts” over against a “world” of human “values”; a “world” of the objective (the “external” world of the content of consciousness) over against an “inner world” of the subjective (the human consciousness). Does mathematics belong to the world of Mind or to the

world of material things? If to both, what possible relation can exist between these two "worlds"? Are the laws for logical reasoning laws in the world of Mind, norm-laws? Then have they then nothing to do with the world of natural facts that is analyzed?

What is the relation of norm-laws to natural laws? Is man a rational ghost in a machine? If man is soul and body (in the sense of higher and lower parts), then how to explain the somehow still sensed unity of Self? You have undoubtedly heard of the whole series of tortured theoretical attempts to force a unity after having started with a twoness, attempts that go by such established names as interactionism, parallelism, occasionalism, ennoetism, impetus theory, hylemorphism, etc. In linguistic science, as in all the other sciences, you get a great variety of schools of interpretation of the phenomenon of language: materialistist, organicist, psychological, technicistic, etc.

Apostate principles of total-structuration have had an influence nothing short of calamitous upon social development and our social studies. Not having any insight into the central Kingdom-rule of Christ, men have failed to observe the limita-

tions of delegated authorities granted to human office-bearers in church, state, family, marriage, etc. The totalitarian idea of the cult and of the state are found everywhere. Always an aspect of the temporal diversity of our life has been lifted out, absolutized to take the place of the repressed central, total Rule of Christ. Think of the so-called Christian Middle Ages with their long struggle between the two totalitarian powers of Emperor and Pope!<sup>9</sup>

There is no time to go into all these matters now. But I do want you to begin to see how the great principles of total-structuration of our experience work themselves out in the fundamental problems of all the special sciences. As we have seen, the positivists of the 19th and 20th centuries tried to make the special sciences autonomous with respect to philosophy, and looked upon philosophy as something quite indifferent from the standpoint of their own supposedly empirical research of limited states of affairs. Perhaps I can dispense most quickly with this matter by offering you a short quotation from Herman Dooyeweerd's *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*:

9. See below, pp. 188-192.

It is impossible to establish a line of demarcation between philosophy and science in order to *emancipate the latter from the former*. Science cannot be isolated in such a way as to give it a completely independent sphere of investigation and any attempt to do so cannot withstand a serious critique. It would make sense to speak of the autonomy of the special sciences if, and only if, a special science could actually investigate a specific aspect of temporal reality without theoretically considering its coherence with the other aspects. No scientific thought, however, is possible in such isolation “with closed shutters.” Scientific thought is constantly confronted with the temporal coherence of meaning among the modal aspects of reality, and cannot escape from following a transcendental Idea of this coherence... even the special sciences investigating the first two modal aspects of human experience, i.e. the arithmetical and the spatial, cannot avoid making philosophical presuppositions in this sense.<sup>10</sup>

Fundamentally, that is the reason that we must have an integral development of both philosophy

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10. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I, p. 548. Read the whole section there, Vol. I, pp. 545-556.



and all the special sciences out of their common religious starting-point in the Word-revelation of the Truth. Nothing short of a center of higher studies where all the work arises from a radically scriptural point of departure, a fellowship in the Truth, can be of any real help to us in the very critical and very complicated needs of our twentieth century society. The philosopher needs the special scientist, and vice versa. But neither can satisfy the other's needs except they both experience an organic growth of mind in a common submission to the Word of God. *That* is what makes a Christian university or a Christian center of research and higher studies. Not a group of persons alone; but a common Principle. For persons are always directed by such a Principle.

### **Distortions of the Law**

Before I conclude this already heavy lecture, I must call your attention to one more type of apostate distortion. I refer to distortions with respect to the Law. In dealing with the Law we are dealing with the most basic problem of philosophy. For this whole universe is a Law-order, subject to the Creator's holy will. Everything within and without us

is lawful, full of law, law-states. The Law of God is the all-encompassing environment of our lives that both marks off the creation from the Creator and also ties it to Him. To know God is to know the Law as His *Will for* what He calls into being. The Law is other than the creation, as it is other than God Himself. God *creates* the cosmos; He *puts* His Law. The creation is; the Law *holds* or *obtains*.

The Greeks, who had no true knowledge of the sovereign Law-giver, could not have a true knowledge of the Law either. They easily forgot that the Law comes from without the cosmos, is put by God to the cosmos. So it was that views arose which first identified the Law with some portion of the cosmos. Since, as we have seen, the Greeks no longer “saw” the central religious depth-level of cosmic existence, the Law came naturally to be identified with (a part of) the *functional cosmos, with some kind of cosmic functioning. Function and Law were identified.*

Now, in reality, such functioning is not identified with *the law for that functioning*. There has been a lot of confusion at this point. Physicists will speak of their mathematical formulae as laws.

But these formulae, of course, are not the Law for physical functions; they are shorthand symbolical formulations of the regular subjective responses of uniformities the physicist observes in physical situations. We cannot observe the Law directly; we observe it indirectly through observation of the lawful responses of things to the Law-demand. What the Law itself is we know from the Word of God.

### **Functionalism**

The view that the only Law is the lawful behaviour observed in the states of affairs of things and persons we call functionalism. Here we have another one of those “-ism” words. God created a cosmos of functions under the Law. The functional cosmos has its own place in the whole. But it is not also the Law. When one identifies the two, he makes the functional cosmos to be “more” in his theory than it is in reality by virtue of God’s creation-ordinance. The theory exaggerates (distorts) the place of the functional cosmos by enlarging its role. That is functionalism.

This functionalism appeared in the Greek world in two main types, because there are two different

kinds of function of the cosmos. I can scarcely take the time to make this thoroughly clear. But we shall make a beginning now, and possibly return to it in one way or another tomorrow.

We have spoken a number of times of the great diversity of functional life we find in this temporal existence of ours: physical and organic, psychical and analytical, historical, lingual, economic, aesthetic, ethical and so on. Now, I can say, for example, that we men are so constituted that among other things we can sense what is beautiful. Seeing an accident on the street, I can point my finger and say that one of the parties was responsible. That is a kind of human experience, but I doubt if any of us would call it an aesthetic experience. But if you see me in an art gallery drinking in the beauty of the light on an old Rembrandt canvas you say that I am having an aesthetic experience. I can have the same experience by looking at the sunset, or by sitting and listening to a symphony or concerto on my hi-fi set. I am busy drinking in beauty. But now, also that Rembrandt and the concerto and the sunset are beautiful. They all, as I, function somehow in an aesthetic way. Aesthetic laws hold for those *ob-*

*jects* of my aesthetic appreciation as well as for my *subjective* appreciation itself.

Again, I am such a being that I can pledge my fidelity to my fellow man. Human society is unthinkable without this element of constancy, as the Greek philosophical comic poet Epicharmos pointed out in his criticism of the constantly changing man of Xenophanes. I make such a pledge of faithfulness when I take a life-partner, and I wear this wedding ring as a symbol of that pledge. What now is that wedding ring? You might take a look, and say that it's beautiful. To be sure, it functions aesthetically. You might also have said that it is a good example of technical construction. Again, you are right. But you have not put your finger on the dominant function of the wedding ring until you have pointed to its symbolizing ethical meaning, the faithfulness between husband and wife. Yet that wedding ring does not function ethically in the same way I do; it does not, for example, go around pledging its troth. We say that man functions as an ethical subject; the ring, as an ethical object. But the object-function of the ring requires the corresponding human subject function. Created reality

everywhere displays this subject-object structure.

Flowers do not function in a social way subjectively: they develop no forms of social intercourse. But when brought into the club room or reception hall they serve to heighten the subjective social life of man. They make it, for example, that the rooms “lend themselves better” to pleasant and easy social intercourse. In the social sphere they function objectively. Likewise, that gas and oil out there in the province of Alberta, tin, copper and iron all can function as objects in the technical, economic and aesthetic life of man. Water, as a concrete thing, you first think of as a physical and not an organic “thing” (although frequently there may be organic “things” – we would hope quite harmless – floating around in it). Yet we may never “shut off” water into a purely physical world of Matter. In the cosmos of God’s creation, it has an objective function in connection with organic life: water is necessary for the sustenance of that life. And who would wish to deny the psychical or “feeling” role it plays in our life when we crave the “feel” of one more late summer’s dash into the surf?

Everywhere, on all the modal levels except the earliest (i.e. the numerical), we find these subject-object relationships in the functional cosmos. Now, when we group all the possible subject-functions of all the modal levels together, we have the subjective side of the functional cosmos. Similarly, we can group all the object-functions together and have the objective side of the functional cosmos.

### **Subjectivism and Objectivism, the Two Forms of Functionalism**

It is for this reason that in Greek philosophy, functionalism could assume the two forms of subjectivism and objectivism. In each case the Law is identified with one side or the other of the functional cosmos. We must therefore always keep in mind that subjectivism and objectivism are not the same as subjective and objective. “Subjective” and “objective” refer to the two sides of the functional cosmos of God’s creation; they belong to the true structure of reality. On the other hand, the terms “subjectivism” and “objectivism” (with their corresponding adjectives “subjectivistic” and “objectivistic”) are only applicable to human theoretical constructions

in which a greater ontic role is assigned to “the subjective” or “the objective,” as the case may be, than these have in reality by reason of the Law-word of God. Subjectivism raises some subject-functioning to the status of Law, which function never has; objectivism does the same thing with some objective functioning.

It will help here to offer a brief example of subjectivism. In classical aesthetic theory there are laws coming from without which the aesthetic performer must look to and obey if his work is to be aesthetically good. But a truly romantic spirit will burst out: No; Mozart is his own Law. He need not look outside himself for a standard or norm; he himself and he alone is the Norm. Mozart’s playing of the piano is the Law for piano playing. The Genius is his own Law. Now that is subjectivism. Here is the identification of Law and subjective behaviour. The Kinsey report on the sexual behaviour of the American male is another example of the same thing; there is no Law except what the subject itself does.

Objectivism is a little different. The subjectivists had not yet learned to distinguish the difference between the two kinds of functioning: subject and



object. The objectivists have, but they immediately proceed to identify their newly discovered object with the Law for the subject. You see at once: the objectivistic conception of the creation-order is analytically richer; it has seen in some fashion the difference there really is between subject and object; it has “probed” deeper into the rich diversity of God’s creation. But we must not now make the mistake of rushing to call objectivism a truer conception than subjectivism. For the object is not the Law for the subject; nor is the subject related to the object as to its norm. The whole newly seen relationship is also seen *distortedly*. In reality, both subject- and object-function are subject(ed) to the Law. The whole ontology of Greek objectivism, where even the gods are subject(ed) to the Object, is a gross distortion of the structure of reality. At work in the distortion is the religious need to say what the Law is. The advance in analysis is at once affected by this deeper religious factor. Thus, a theory can be analytically richer and yet not one whit more true. (Remember what we said at the beginning of this lecture about the meaning of “truth.”)

It is not difficult to see how the Greek objectivists, given their paganistic, immanentistic religious “bent,” could mistake the object for the Law. For one thing, the Law is the firm foundation of everything. The whole creation is anchored in the surety (Dutch: *de vastheid*) of God’s Law-word. These apostate men too are in need of that Security, that solid Ground, that Comfort of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks, just as all of us men are. But they do not seek it where it is to be found; they seek it within created reality. And now, lo, this object they have just discovered as a new something distinct from the subject appears to these men to be that needed, and sought for, sure ground, much surer than mere subjective existence. For that reason, they speak of it as “that which truly is,” in contrast to the subjective as “that which not is,” i.e. that which does not come up to the standard of reliable being. A very brief illustration will suffice here. When on Monday morning we are told that the minister’s wife ran away after the evening service with the most prominent elder of the congregation, we say, “Why, I would never have dreamed of such a thing; and I knew them both very well.”

How little we really know another human subject! Yes, there you have all the uncertainty that is involved in our knowledge of subjects. But now let me hold up before all of you here in this room a book in a red and black binding. Each one of you subjects responds that the binding is red and black. That seems so sure to you that you would mark as abnormal anyone who did not agree. And your knowledge of those colors would seem to remain sure day after day. Now the natural subjects (fruit juices or whatever) that were used for the colors are one thing, and our knowledge of them may be highly uncertain; the color that I sense is a psychical object-function of those subjects, related to my psychical functioning as subject. And that object seems really knowable and really reliable.

A second factor present in the situation we have just described and further abetting the confusion of object and Law is that the object exercises a tremendous influence upon my subjective behaviour. Did we not all feel compelled just now to say that the cover of the book was red and black? That is the law on that subject; that judgment on our part would seem to be binding. But is it not the work of the

Law to bind? The famous Socrates of Greek philosophy was an objectivist. It seems he did a good deal of thinking about man's technical work, and the role of the technical object especially impressed him. An artisan must know his materials, and what they lend themselves for. He would not think of making shoes out of marble, or statues of leather. The object determines what the subject can do and what he does. Just think how much our conduct is governed by all the sights, smells, sounds and tastes of our daily experience!

Whatever is right in all this analysis of the role of the object, there is something badly wrong about it too. The role of the object has been confused with the role of the Law. Your girl may decide that she wants you. She wears an alluring perfume, and you find yourself very much subject to its influence. No doubt it will influence your behaviour. But it is not the Norm for your behaviour. Objects undoubtedly govern our conduct in many ways; they are not the Law for them. And if we confuse the role of object and the role of Law we may find ourselves in serious trouble.

## Platonic Realism

It was Plato who finally came to realize that the Law is not to be found in any subject- or object-functioning. He recognized both subjects and objects; he granted the subject-object relation. But the Law was a third thing. The Law was a separate realm of law-essences. This Greek ontological view we call realism. It is the third of the distorting Greek views about the Law.

In this Platonic realism we once more find *analytical advance that does not bring us one whit closer to the Truth*. (Remember what we have been saying about the Truth.) It is, of course, correct to say, as Plato does, that the Law is not something within the cosmos of functions. But Plato does not say that because, being in the grip of the Word of God, he knows the Truth about the Law. His negative statement is yet abstract until you hear why he says that. Analytically, Plato has found difficulties with identifying the Law with any functions. But that does not bring him to the Truth about the Law. *For the Truth cannot be found analytically*. Without the revealing POWER of the Word of God Plato can only use his analytical results in the service of one

more religious distortion. And that is what his realism is.

Plato taught a separate world of law-essences, of *things* that are at one and the same time *abiding and sure principles of oughtness* (even more sure than the Object of the objectivists) and *perfect, eternal models* of all earthly forms of existence. I am speaking of Plato's world of *ideas*. In this other world we find, for instance, what it is for the good to be, or *the law for the good*. But this law is itself a perfect Thing, a Substance: it is the Good Itself. Likewise, we find there what it is for the beautiful to be, or *the law for the beautiful*. But again, the law is also a Thing: the Beautiful Itself. And so also we find in this world of ideas Man Himself (the law for what it is to be man), Circle Itself, even Numbers Themselves (e.g. Seven Itself), etc.

These law-essences are law substances that simply subsist in the cosmos and have the force of law. Gods and men are subject to them. They are called purely intelligible essences, which means that they are beheld by Mind alone and not by the changing senses (which are admixed with something not rational). It is right at this point that we see the

apostate character of Platonic realism. Really to know the Law is to tremble before the God of the whole earth, Whose word the Law is. In Plato the law has been divorced from the sovereign God; it exists in itself. It is substance. And it is intelligible substance. That is, with all the supposed calmness and self-possession of normalcy I simply look out with my Mind toward a realm of eternally-existent, purely intelligible law-essences and behold the Truth. All the “fear and trembling” has been removed. And it is not the religious depth-relation to God that is necessary here to know the Law and the Truth, but only our rational life, elevated to the heart-position. The veritable Truth of God, that Reality is the Covenant of Life between man and God, has been utterly lost sight of. Whatever may be correct and “noble” in Plato’s analysis, we have to do in his philosophy primarily with the falsity of apostasy. Plato, fallen from his representative Place (Office) in the cosmos, cannot “see” the nature of the Truth.

### **The Christian Thesis**

This account we have now so summarily given will

have to suffice to illustrate the nature of antithetical thought. I think we can all see a lot better now that it is the Word of God that alone grants to men the Light of Truth, and that without it, even though we are forever dealing, as we must, with the Law-order of the Creator-God, we can never arrive at a knowledge of the Truth. The religious situation of man demands a repressing and supplanting Distortion, the Lie, to take the place of the Truth that is being repressed.

I believe that one last thing ought yet to be said by way of clarifying this matter of antithesis before we close. Many of us are, I am sure, inclined to think of the Christian side of the struggle with the world of unbelief as the antithetical side. We sometimes hear the Christian position spoken of as the position of the Antithesis. That can only mean, however, that the struggle of the Kingdom of Christ is in antithetical relation to the struggle of the Kingdom of Darkness. In our thinking about the matter we must never lose sight of what is prior. The creation-order, firmly secured in the Divine Will, is the Original Truth. And the Christian religion is in very truth the re-proclamation, in the



Second Representative (Office-bearing) Man, of the Order of Creation, centered in the covenantal life-fellowship of God and man. God's righteousness in Christ (Romans 1) calls us back to Life in terms of the Law-order. Christ, as we saw, brings us back to the creation-ordinances. As such, Christianity is the re-proclamation of the THESIS. God's Truth is first. The repressing and supplanting Distortion, the LIE or ANTITHESIS, came second, and on the human level, and can only exist as a distortion of (thus dependent upon) the THESIS. The Word of God is the POWER that liberates us from the Darkness of the LIE that has darkened the insight of our race (see Job) and sets us in the Light of Truth. The certainty of the Truth is not our work. All certitude is the work of the Word and Spirit of God in our hearts. Let us bless the Word of God always.



# 4

## SYNTHESIS

### *Lecture 3*

*September 1959*

BEFORE I GET INTO THE material of this lecture, I want to say a word of appreciation to all you participants in this Unionville Study Conference. I spoke in the first lecture of a certain hesitation in Canada as to the way we have to go, but I must say that my contacts with you students here, and with the teachers and the ministers of the gospel, have caused me to think that the hesitation is somewhat less than I had supposed. At least in some very promising places. At any rate, the spirit in this Conference is wonderful. I just had to say to you that I am really overwhelmed, thankful to God and happy about the spirit everywhere present here.

### **The Thread of the Lectures**

Now, we have talked together so far about Thesis and Antithesis, and today we must make an effort to understand what is meant by Synthesis. But for just a moment yet you will have to be patient with me while I pick up the main thread of the lectures for one more time, and say a couple of things that really have to be said before we come to this question of synthesis itself.

The first thing I want to say this morning is that I am quite sure that yesterday's lecture was more difficult than today's will be. That is a good idea, is it not, to shove the most difficult lecture into the middle position, where it is nicely hidden away? I suppose some people will think it unwise that I have attempted so much in these lectures. I can only plead that I quite deliberately chose to do it this way. I do not, of course, expect you in these three days to get a firm grasp on everything I have said. We do not, unfortunately for me, have the opportunity to talk frequently together about these great central matters of our life; for that reason we must choose those things which, lying at the very heart, determine all the rest. All I can hope is that

somewhere deep in your selfhood you will sense, in general, the lay of the land as a whole. That is what you need first, I believe: a general sense of the lay of the whole land; some sense of the direction our work as Christians ought to take in general. I am myself very much convinced that everything in the world of learning depends on the point of departure of one's thought. And that all problems light up in their true meaning when seen from out of the center. Always there is the question of totality-structure, of Order. It governs the fundamental formulations of every special science. And so I have chosen the material for these lectures in this way. It may be a little harder on all of us. But I am thinking first of all of the new direction it can give to all our work in the coming years, as we go on individually and collectively in our human calling. From what we shall have done together here you will find, I think, that you can go on and read the books – a great variety of them – more quickly, more efficiently, grasp their big ideas more thoroughly, conduct your discussions with each other more fruitfully, and so on.

In the two previous lectures I tried to suggest that our awareness of the totality-structure of reality is not some knowledge analytically arrived at on our part, but is heart-knowledge, the result of the work of God's Word upon our hearts. We said that by His Word God grasps hold of us in the religious center of our existence and sets us in the Truth. The Word of God is thus seen to be the Word of Truth, and we can now see the intrinsic relation it bears to the world of learning, the problem that beckoned in our first lecture. The Truth of the Word of God is fortunately not just the simple proclamation: JESUS SAVES. It is, in very truth, the re-proclamation of that creation-order that is centered in the basic religious relation between man and God. In an integral creation-order thus centered, the Fall of man meant the radical falling away of the entire creation from its religious concentration upon God. The Restoration is therefore a radical restoration of the entire creation to its directedness upon the loving and obedient service of God through the heart of man. Thus, the Word as re-proclamation is re-proclamation in terms of the New Head of the creation, the Savior Jesus Christ. But we must never

see God or Christ or man apart from the Law-order of God. God, Self and Law-order are always together. Just as God is the absolute Origin of the entire creation (and there is thus nothing left over beside Him), so within the order of creation God finds His creaturely image in the heart of man, the concentration-point of all the aspects of meaning of temporal reality.<sup>1</sup> There can thus be no twoness (or three-ness) of substantial “parts” in man: the whole man, in all his temporal aspects and relations, is in the scriptural view integrally (without any remnant) directed in the religious center of his being towards God and is there concentrated on the whole-hearted service which is the fulfilling of the Law. But now, further, God had made man the lord of creation. Thus, the whole creation too, whatever diversity of moments it displays in a temporal way, exists only in relation to man and in him is gathered up in the integral religious meaning. The temporal creation then is also an integral order, and not, for example, a world of Matter and a world of Mind.

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1. Here I refer you to the excellent lecture entitled “What Is Man?” in Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*.

It is impossible to think of some aspect of the integral creation-order as existing by itself as a separate "world," a special "world" of matter, for instance. In the midst of the world as we *concretely* experience it stands man. Any effort to conceive a separate world of matter involves human thought and language: every concept of natural phenomena implies human conceiving, expressed in mathematical formulae, etc. To get from the concrete world as it is with us in the midst of it to an abstract concept of 'Nature' requires abstraction, and that very abstraction is a logical-theoretical activity that presupposes man and his thinking. So there we are again with man very much involved at the heart of things.

### **Greek Thought as Antithesis of Truth**

We saw yesterday how in the apostate world of (Greek) thought this integral character of all reality had been lost to view. Lacking the central religious knowledge of the selfhood that only the Word of God can implant within us, the Greeks had to fill up the lacuna of this religious knowledge by enlarging (absolutizing) one of the relative aspects of the temporal order and elevating it to the central



religious place of the heart. It is the True nature of things (that man is heart) that drove the Greeks of necessity to their *religious distortion of what they analytically find* in their experience of this temporal life. You realize, of course, that this is true of all apostate men, and not only of the Greeks. But in the Greek world we find the beginnings of mighty historical traditions that have influenced men in all later ages to apply certain principles of total-structuration in their analysis of their experiences. These principles we found to be pseudo-principles, the Distortion, the LIE, that must arise in the religious repression and supplanting of the TRUTH. They are not of an analytical character, and we shall never be able to get at and deal with what is really taking place here in men's lives if we insist on thinking of them as such, that is, as rational achievements on their part.

We saw yesterday that a diversity, actually quite a wide diversity, of such pseudo-principles of total-structuration has arisen in the course of philosophical speculation. (Mankind is a religious fellowship or Community in the Truth that is wrought by the Spirit of God.) Lacking the Truth

(the central and integral religious meaning of the totality of the several aspects of temporal reality), apostate men have turned first to one and then to another of these temporal aspects of the central religious meaning of the creation. I want to say one more thing about this before we go any further. I think you will find it worthwhile to take a somewhat closer look at this phenomenon of the diversity of schools. For whether we work in mathematics, in psychology, in logic, in the language sciences, social sciences or any other special area we shall always be confronted with this diversity of schools of interpretation of the field of investigation. It is the question of the point of view: where one must stand to oversee the entire field aright.

Schools of interpretation arise from this tendency. Men have to take one particular aspect of created reality for the whole of it, thereby reducing all the other aspects to so many modes of the one they have just thus absolutized. But now, to take a relative aspect, imbedded as it is in a whole scale of similarly relative aspects, and religiously to absolutize it and make all the others relative to it as their *fullness of meaning* – that is not just to make

an error here or there in one's reasoning; *that is to obscure one's view of the whole structure of reality*. For then one can no longer grasp any one of the aspects in its peculiar inner nature. One has then the Lie, an untrue view of the totality.

### **Real Basis for All the "Isms"**

How is it possible to be in such a position and still show signs of being sufficiently in touch with reality to uncover, as scientists do, even important moments of truth (those fairly correct statements about limited states of affairs that constantly press upon us all)? The answer lies, in part, in the inner structure of the several aspects themselves. No aspect is a thing cut off from the other aspects; in each aspect we find a modal expression of the integral and radical character of created reality.<sup>2</sup> There is, for instance, the psychical aspect of feeling: a specific sphere of functions subject to their own laws. In the irreducibility of the psychical to any other aspect we have what we call its sphere-sover-

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2. Herman Dooyeweerd, *Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 42-48.

eignty. But over against that there is the principle of sphere-universality. For the one aspect cannot even be except in indissoluble coherence with all the other aspects that together make up the integral whole of reality. Thus, we find within “the psychical” what we call a feeling-life. Now, feeling-life is not primary or organic life; it is rather an analogy or mirroring of the aspect of life within the psychical, in a psychical sense. Likewise, emotion or the movement of feeling is a mirroring of physical-chemical movement, but within the psychical, in a psychical sense. We could all distinguish within the psychical further, logical feeling, feeling for language (Dutch: *taalgevoel*), aesthetic feeling, ethical feeling, feeling of reverence or awe before God, etc. All these feelings show the intimate connection of the psychical with all the other aspects of our temporal existence.

Or take “the aesthetic” aspect of a concrete aesthetic production. Can you imagine a painting or a symphony without a number of parts? Yet that number is not primary number, the numerical aspect of the creation-order; it is an aesthetic mirroring of the aspect of number: the parts are aesthetic parts. There must also be aesthetic space and move-

ment (spread out, compressed, meters, rhythms, etc.). If I had time, I could show how every other aspect is mirrored within “the aesthetic.”

This creation-principle of sphere-universality is no doubt what has supplied whatever grounds men have been able to adduce for their attempts to find the whole meaning of reality in what is actually but one aspect. *But of course, the mirroring of all the sides is not the same thing as all the sides.* It is here therefore that all the “isms” – materialism, organicism, psychologism, logicism, technicism, economism, historicism, aestheticism, moralism, etc. – arise, find a specious legitimacy, but ultimately flounder. Each seems to have something to say for itself; each is in fact a *religious distortion* of the fullness of meaning of reality.

And when you think that we can distinguish at least fourteen or fifteen aspects, you can see what a variety of interpretation is “possible” here. Further – remembering what we discussed yesterday – there is the possibility of overemphasizing either the subject-side (subjectivism) or the object-side (objectivism) or even the law-side (realism) of all these various modal aspects. Hence, the great and confusing

array of philosophical “schools” that have repeatedly taken possession of the hearts of men and tried to keep men satisfied apart from a knowledge of the Truth.

### **The Attempt at Synthesis**

It is time to be getting on to the subject of today’s lecture. Thesis and Antithesis, we have now seen, are actually related to each other as the total Truth to the total distorting Lie. Two things so related can never be accommodated to each other, can never be brought to mutual adjustment. Yet it is just that that is attempted in Synthesis. Synthesis, then, is the attempt to combine the Truth of the Word of God with the constructions of thought that have arisen in the apostate mind. You need only recall that many church fathers of the first Christian centuries had, previous to their conversion to Christianity, been trained in one or another of the philosophical “schools” of thought of the ancient world, some quite thoroughly. Their subsequent “reading” of the Word of God often suffered from the fact that apostate thought had already taken strong hold upon their hearts: they had grown accustomed to look-

ing upon themselves, the world and even God in a certain way, in a way that was actually in conflict with the Truth of God. Yet in one way or another the several fathers of the church tried to “harmonize” the Scriptures and their previously acquired “view.” In this way, often perhaps somewhat unintentionally, the POWER of God was removed by forcing “elements” of biblical truth into structures of thought that, alien to the “elements,” put upon these another meaning than they have in the Word itself. The integral radical character of the creation was lost to view; the central religious situation of man was obscured; true religion was weakened.

If those early fathers had clearly seen what the Word of God really is, and thus seen its intrinsic relation to the world of learning, they would undoubtedly have seen also that synthesis is impossible. For there are no biblical “elements” apart from the one structure of the Word of God, the Truth. Neither are there “elements” of pagan thought that are not “in-formed” by the deep-seated apostatic principles of total-structuration that distort the whole. The warfare between the Truth of God and the distorting Lie of religious repression is a *total*

one that is found everywhere among the “details” of our analytical life, underlying these. Synthesis is thus seen to be an utter impossibility; men can attempt it, but they cannot consummate it. And the inner tension between the two alien religious basic-motives drives men on to a Choice. For that reason, the modern period of history has, except in traditionalistic “orthodox” Christian circles, rejected the attempt as even an acceptable ideal: modern thought is decidedly anti-synthetic. You can see now why I had in these lectures to begin with a discussion of the nature and role of the Word of God. When you see what that is, your position is decided. You will reject all efforts at synthesis. (This does not mean, of course, that we are not forever finding ourselves *guilty* of making synthetic attempts. We are sinners not yet wholly subject to the Rule of the Word. But we will recognize our guilt and reject the desirability of synthesis when we have seen the nature of the Word of God.)

### **Law as Rational *a priori* and its Synthesis with Revelation about Law of God**

Synthetic philosophical conceptions can be just



about as manifold as the number of apostate conceptions. For one could attempt to understand the Word of God in the “light” of any one of the traditional Greek conceptions (except perhaps materialism). In these lectures it is naturally impossible for me to go into all the possibilities. Instead, I choose one line of attempt at synthesis and go into it somewhat more fully. This one that I choose has to do with a synthesis of the Word and a certain pagan view of the Law. We have seen how fundamental the Law is. This particular story I am choosing had, further, the most momentous consequences for our modern life. If you Canadian students are to understand your new homeland and its universities, an inquiry into this particular history that I am about to relate is quite indispensable.

To begin the story, I must get back once more to the ancient world. The Law, you must remember, holds for created reality. All men, even though fallen away from a knowledge of the Truth, necessarily experience the influence of the Law. But pagan men cannot know what the Law is; for it is nothing else than the Will of the sovereign God for His creation. Not knowing what it is, but experiencing it

as a real power in their life, the Greeks were driven to a distorted account of it. Thus far I have shown you three Greek answers to the question about the nature of the Law: subjectivism, objectivism, and realism.

Ultimately there came a *fourth answer*, and it is to it that I wish to limit myself now. This view arose not in the classical Greek age (which we may conveniently consider as coming to a close with the deaths of Alexander the Great and Aristotle in 323 and 322 BC respectively), but in the following Hellenistic period. From that time it entered into many aspects of the work of church fathers, medieval scholastic philosophers and church canonists, and finally experienced a mighty resurgence in the great revival of Stoical ideas of the seventeenth century, when it became the veritable main-spring of modern political and social action.<sup>3</sup>

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3. See Ernst Cassirer's fine chapter "The Renaissance of Stoicism and 'Natural Right' Theories of the State," chapter XIII of his important book *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

This fourth view about the Law we call the theme of the *a priori*. Although I have indirectly intimated (by the reference to Cassirer's book) that it is connected with the Stoics, it is in actuality not restricted to them, but emerges in one form or another in just about every philosophical "school" of the Hellenistic period, each time as the result of a certain analogous development that is taking place in the several "schools." Prof. Vollenhoven of the Free University of Amsterdam has done wonderful historical pioneer work on this question.

Speaking very generally, we can describe what took place as follows. The new, frequently non-Greek, peoples who now begin to appear upon the philosophical stage become skeptical of (i.e. they call into question) the – to them – dogmatical pronouncements of their Greek predecessors. Now those "pronouncements" had concerned in the first instance whatever in a given philosophical conception was taken to be the ground of certainty, that which supposedly was eminently knowable. And that, of course, has to do with the Law. In objectivism it was the Object (the capital letter suggesting the exaggeration of object to Law); in realism, the

law-essences or absolute Substances. The Hellenistic Age is characterized in philosophical matters first of all by the skeptical movement, which in each "school" calls into question first the eminent knowability and thereafter the very existence of whatever in the school is being taken as the Law.

To imagine the effect of this scepticism you need only remember that the Object, for the objectivist, and the ideas (law-essences), for the realist, are the *Guide of life*. Think of Socrates' analysis of handicraft: the artisan is guided by what the objective material lends itself for. The Object of the objectivist directs my subjective functioning ("affects" and "is law for" have been confused here, you will remember); the ideas of Plato are the Truth by which our lives are to be directed. With the rise of the scepticism, doubt has now arisen with respect to these several Guides of life.

### **The Emphasis on the Subjective**

In the course of the Hellenistic centuries we see in all the philosophical schools a solution gradually being worked out to meet the new need for certainty in life. The solution almost universally accepted

is the theme of the *a priori*. This new theme says, in effect, that the certainty, the direction I need in my life but no longer have from any external Object or world of law-essences *I have within myself*. The Meso-Platonists (a post-sceptis development in the Academy that Plato had founded), for instance, said something like this: the ideas of Plato, as criteria for the true, the good and the beautiful, simply cannot be missed; life as it must be lived requires some principial direction from the beginning, some directing knowledge; if my life is not to be directionless and meaningless, there simply have to be such absolute Norms as Plato had conceived in the ideas. These Meso-Platonists then went on *to agree with their sceptical predecessors* in the Academy (the Middle and New Academy) that the ideas do not exist where Plato had looked for them, viz. in a separate world behind this world of process, but also to add that exist they do, and that *in our own thinking mind (the Nous)*.

From this we see the true nature of this theme of the *a priori*. The Law of God is the Firm Foundation of the creation, the Director of our ways. As the Word that faithfully establishes His covenant

with us, the Law is also our only Comfort. The earlier pagans lacked this central religious certainty. But as religious creatures they need and seek something that can take the place of this Law-word of God. They had sought this Basis and Director of Life in Nature, in the Object, in a separate world of law-essences (ideas). But now in this new theme of the *a priori*, they seek it *within their own subjective knowledge-possession*. The Law is no longer looked upon as something extra-mental, about which intra-mental knowledge can be acquired in the form of concepts, judgments, etc., but as something that itself is a concept, thus knowledge. Of course, it is not a concept like other concepts: it is not only a universal concept but also a binding concept (one having the force of law). Such a concept is not, like other concepts, due to experience (i.e. it does not arise out of experience), but precedes every possible experience and constitutes experience (as to its lawful structure). *It is a concept a priori*. It is *knowledge a priori*. *Innate ideas*.

The illustration has been used of the “sensitive jelly glass.” Here is a jelly glass just like other jelly glasses in most respects, only this one was “sensi-

tive.” Each year, this sensitive jelly glass once mused to itself, the housewife prepared various sorts of jellies, and finally placed these in the various jelly glasses. But at this point the sensitive jelly glass was confronted with a problem. One year its contents had been green and thin; another year, thicker and red, and so on. But every year the shape, the form of the contents had been the very same. And now this sensitive jelly glass, after some further “musing,” came up with the solution: the color and consistency of the contents had come from the contents that had been poured in; the form or shape of the contents, however, must be due to the nature of the jelly glass itself. The jelly glass’ own nature determined, as the *a priori*, the possibility of the form. So our minds, possessed of the *a priori* law (the Truth), determine the possibilities of our life.

### **The Concept of Reason**

Here is the origin of that concept of “Reason” that looms so large and exercises so fundamental and pervasive an influence in the modern rationalistic philosophy of western Europe from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. “Reason” does

not exist; there is no such thing. Incidentally, that is why we may never give an answer to the question, What is the relation of faith and reason? The question is not properly formulated. God endowed us at the creation with *understanding*; "Reason" is that understanding distorted in apostate theory by being "enlarged" to include the Law as *a priori knowledge-content* (the Truth). In the Distortion "Reason," instead of the Word of God, becomes the Principle, the Director, the Guide of life, the Source of Truth. Already you begin to discern the modern chant: Reason, the only Oracle of man. Once having arrived at this point, we can see ahead to the *lumen naturale* of Descartes, the "natural light." That "natural light," instead of being the Light which in the creation-order is as revelation (which revelation man in apostasy is not in a position to receive as light but must repress and thus remain in darkness), has turned into an inner light of each man's deepest Self, a light capable of directing him through to final salvation, and that apart from the efficacious application to him by God's Spirit of the redemption purchased by Christ.



It is accordingly not difficult to see that the concept of Reason belongs to the realm of apostate Antithesis, is a concept of Truth in antithetical relation to the Truth and Light of the Divine Word. Yet you will be disappointed if you expect your Anglo-Saxon neighbor to see that. Is that a mystery? Then let me clear away the mystery at once by saying that it is not some virtue in Dutchmen and some lack in Anglo-Saxon blood that makes the difference. To understand the USA and Canada (or Australia or New Zealand), to understand much that you will hear in your university classes and in all this particular intellectual world around us here you will have to know something about the devastating role that synthesis-thinking has played in Christian circles, also in connection with this theme of the *a priori*. In the Netherlands the appearance on the scene of Groen van Prinsterer, Kuyper, the philosophy of the Law-idea (*de Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*), etc., signaled a desire for a radical break with long-established patterns of synthesis-thinking in favor of a radically scriptural outlook upon and approach to life. That is what has made Dutch Calvinism distinctive; that has been the strength of the revival of

Christian life and scholarship in the Netherlands.

For the Word of God is the only POWER that can redirect man's ways to blessedness in covenantal fellowship with God. In other Protestant countries the integral strength of living by the Scriptures has constantly been sapped by the hold that synthesis-thinking has had upon the hearts of men.

### **The Choice Before Us Today**

This is the situation that I was describing at the beginning of the first lecture. We have to choose which way we are going to go in Canada and really in all North America. Also, in our scholarship. It is the choice between a way radically (i.e. from out of the root or center of our existence) and thus exclusively directed by Scripture and a way that seeks a synthesis between the Truth of the Word of God and the Lie of apostasy. The absolutely fundamental importance of this question for you and me individually, for the whole fabric of our life together as Christians in the future, and even for the prospect of evangelizing this North American continent in any integral sense, requires that I take a little time, in the remainder of this lecture, to show you the

nature of synthesis-thinking.

We can, I think, best begin with the case of Justin Martyr. This man was a typical Hellenistic wandering philosopher. He had been born in Palestine early in the second century after Christ, had been subject to Platonic, Stoical and other Hellenistic philosophical influences, and finally had become a Christian about AD 133, probably at Ephesus. He was martyred at Rome ca. 165.

### **Synthesis in Justin Martyr**

Justin's acquaintance with the philosophical movements of his time would certainly have introduced him to the widely held theme of the *a priori*. But let us see what he does with it after he has become a Christian. The name of Justin is connected with what is called the *logos-speculation*. "Logos," as you may know, is the Greek word that occurs at the beginning of John's gospel and is translated "Word." "In the beginning was the Word," etc. In Greek "*logos*" means not only "*word*" but also "*reason*." In the writings of Justin and other early Christian apologists the concepts of Reason (natural light, or natural revelation *experienced as light*, i.e. not repressed

by a sinful heart, revelation that gets home and directs us to our ultimate salvation) and of the Word are confused, and appeal is typically made to such a verse as John 1:9. At that place we read, "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." That, at least, is the translation you will find in the King James Version. Actually, the words "that cometh" are a present participle in Greek ("coming") in a form that would allow as antecedent either the word "light" or the word "man." But Justin and others apparently took the verse to mean that Christ as the light of Reason illumines the rational processes of all men as they are born into the world. This He does apparently not particularly as Redeemer but as the agent of creation. For the operation of the one *Logos* is apparent everywhere; universally He sets our minds right in their law-concepts (the *a priori*) as to the good, the true and the beautiful. Whoever had permitted the seed-corn to germinate in his soul and had lived according to the directions of the *logos*, Christians counted *as one of themselves*, i.e. men like Herakleitos, Sokrates and the Stoic Musonius. Justin says the Stoics and others were able to speak of a *logos* in

their philosophy only because they were themselves illumined by the *Logos*, whom Christians know in Christ. In his effort to get the ear of the emperor and to win his old pagan associates, Justin would show the essential unity of truth in Greek philosophy and the divine revelation especially in Scripture. *The antithesis between true and false prophecy is concealed behind an assumed mere difference of degree of clarity or insight.* That is synthesis.

Hans Lietzmann writes in his *The Founding of the Church Universal*: “[The *Logos*] became the ‘new law-giver,’ although the ‘new, eternal, and final’ law was the old law of rational virtue long recognized by sages.” Again:

Christianity of this kind was a genuinely philosophical system constructed of familiar elements. The idea of God was borrowed from popular philosophy and, even in the expressions employed, corresponded with what we can find among the religious-minded Stoics in the first century... Already in John’s Gospel, Jesus Christ had been described as the *logos* of God. Whereas in John, this identification was meant to abrogate the historical limitations of Jesus’ life and to raise it to eternal significance,

we find in Justin a tendency almost in the contrary direction. The purpose was to render it impossible to reject the authority of Christ's teaching in this way, and to make it cast a light on the examination conducted by reason. Jesus was indeed the incarnate divine reason, and consequently everything truly reasonable on this earth must in the end agree with Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

There is one more sentence I must cite from Lietzmann:

...in whatever ways this doctrine may have penetrated in detail into Justin's working ideas, and however strange it may seem when contrasted with the early Christian ideas, Justin and his fellow-warriors introduced it into speculative theology, where it immediately dominated all thought, and continued to do so triumphantly for many centuries.<sup>5</sup>

*There you have the historical influence of synthesis-thought.* And let me append at once, as illustra-

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4. Hans Lietzmann, *The Founding of the Church Universal*, 3rd ed., trans. Bertram Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), pp. 182-183.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

tion of the continued sway of these ideas, the words F. Godet comments upon John 1:9 in his widely used Commentary: “It is more natural... to find here... the notion [of] the *Logos*, as the internal light, enlightening every man, illuminating him by the sublime intuitions of the good, the beautiful and the true.”<sup>6</sup> While on the very same page just before that he holds that these words signify “that the light of the *Logos* is a divine gift which every man brings with him when he is born – that the matter in question is, accordingly, an innate light” (italics mine).<sup>7</sup> Godet knows the tradition. He writes (on verse 4 and the word Light):

All the rays of the sentiment of the beautiful, the true and the just which have illuminated and which ennoble humanity, justify the expression of John. It is this fundamental truth which was formulated by the Fathers (Justin, Clement of Alexandria) in their doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*.<sup>8</sup>

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6. F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2 vols., trans., Timothy Dwight (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), vol. I, p. 259.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

### **Synthesis in Later Christian Thought**

We could go on. I should like to show you similar things in the greatest of the church fathers, Augustine of Hippo. You know, it is always particularly instructive to attend closely to Augustine. No father of the church understood better the central thrust of the Word of God. But, you know, we often make ourselves guilty of idealizing Augustine. Time after time, in his wrestling for the Truth, one can see how the deeply entrenched themes of pagan philosophy prevent his realizing fully what in a sense he understands of the Word of God. The theme of the *a priori*, combined with the theme of macrocosm and microcosm, a Greek conception of “soul” and “body,” and much more that cannot be reconciled with the divine Word is to be found prominently exposed in the thought of Augustine. It is true that as he matured in the Christian faith, and particularly after he was made bishop, Augustine saw more and more the need of being “normed” exclusively by the Scriptures. The *Retractationes* speak eloquently here. Nevertheless, we ought never to give in to the argument of some quarters that we might well call ourselves Augustinians. Calvin is farther



along the road of reformation than Augustine, and the line on to Kuyper and our own time is clear enough to the serious student who will investigate the matter.<sup>9</sup> We cannot turn the clock back; anachronism always ends in destruction of some kind. *For reformation is not to be found on the horizontal line; it is found in the vertical relation of obedience to the Word.*

I should like to have said something about the Nature-Grace scheme of Thomas Aquinas and the mighty scholastic movement in general, which has revived to become quite a power in the twentieth century. (You are well acquainted with the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies here in Toronto.) I should like to have shown how a whole block of pagan thought (largely Aristotle's, plus a little Platonism or neo-Platonism and some Stoicism) was thus allowed to remain intact, un-reformed by the central thrust of the Word of God. But time is now pressing, and I want, in conclusion, to bring up two

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9. Permit me to suggest the article "Kuyper's Wetenschapsleer" by Herman Dooyeweerd in *Philosophia Reformata* (Kampen: J.H. Kok), Vol. 4 (1939), pp. 193-232.

particular synthetic movements that are of especially great importance for understanding the intellectual and religious climate of the North American continent. I refer to the Cambridge Platonists and the Scottish realists.

You must remember that we are here discussing these movements as examples of synthesis-thinking. To do that really effectively I would have to sketch for you something more of the revival of the apostate theme of the *a priori* in the seventeenth century. I have already referred to Descartes' "natural light." Time will allow me only to mention in passing the *De Veritate* (1624) of Herbert of Cherbury<sup>10</sup> and the *De jure belli et pacis* (1625) of Hugo Grotius.<sup>11</sup> I have discussed their significance a bit in my Calgary paper of 1957, "The Development of Calvinism in North America on the Background of

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10. Edward Herbert, *De Veritate*, trans, with an intro. by Meyrick H. Carre (Bristol: J.N. Arrowsmith Ltd., 1937).

11. Hugo Grotius, *The Law of War and Peace*, intro. James Scott, trans. Francis Kelsey (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).

its Development in Europe.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Approach of the Cambridge Platonists**

Most of these Cambridge Platonists had had a Puritan upbringing. One of the best recent books about them is that by the great German Jewish philosopher who came to the United States during the Second World War, Ernst Cassirer.<sup>13</sup> More recently a volume was published by Cambridge University Press showing the close connection between the Cambridge Platonists and the Remonstrants: Rosalie Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*, a study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians.<sup>14</sup> What characterizes the teaching of this group of

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12. H. Evan Runner, “The Development of Calvinism in North America on the Background of its Development in Europe.” Unpublished paper distributed by the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
  13. Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. James Pettegrove (New York: Gordian Press, 1970).
  14. Rosalie L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

men?

They were moderates, taking up a position midway between the Puritans and the Prelatists. They were pleaders for toleration in the midst of England's civil wars. (See my Calgary paper for the significance of the modern concept of toleration.) But what is most characteristic of them is the way they deliberately founded their position on tolerance on a philosophic basis. That philosophic basis is their doctrine of the place of Reason in religion! They subordinate religious conviction to the law of sufficient reason. "Though the human mind is dependent on revelation for the full reality of the saving truths, yet it remains, nevertheless, the measure of their possibility."<sup>15</sup> These men had as their motto Proverbs 20:27: "The spirit of a Man is the Candle of the Lord," but they took that spirit to be Reason. "Reason discovers what is Natural; and Reason receives what is Supernatural," is how one of them puts it. "To go against Reason is to go against God" (Whichcote). Cassirer warns us rightly to bear in mind that "that reason upon which they would base

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15. Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, p. 39.

religious faith is rather practical reason than theoretical reason. The *a priori* of pure morality is the starting-point of their doctrine; and from here they ascend to religious belief on the one hand, and on the other to the sphere of metaphysical certainty, to speculative knowledge of the nature of the soul and of the intelligible world.”<sup>16</sup>

To Puritans and Prelatists alike they say: Unite on essentials and agree to differ on non-essentials. But how does a man distinguish between these two? By improvement of one’s reason, by its employment in the fields of science and of moral conduct, and above all, by its employment about the truths of Natural Religion. In this way one grows in knowledge of that which is most knowable of God – a process by which one becomes more and more “like unto God,” till the perfection of reason is reached in that “Divine sagacity,” as Henry More calls it, that “nativity from above” as Whichcote (the founder of the movement) calls it, which makes a man at last a sure judge of what is essential in the teaching of the Scriptures. The Cambridge Platonists go really farther than the Arminians. Reason must be subli-

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

mated or deified into “Divine sagacity” by the presence of God in the soul. The interpreter of inspired Scripture must be himself inspired. “Reason is the divine governor of man’s life; it is the very voice of God.”

### **Practical Effects of Cambridge Platonist Teaching**

I think I need not take the pains to point out to you how the Truth of the Word of God is being distorted here by being accommodated to the idea of Reason as the Oracle of man. One practical effect of the teachings of these Cambridge Platonists I must not neglect to point out to you, however. Let me do it by citing something James Martineau wrote in his *Types of Ethical Theory* about one of these Platonists, viz. Ralph Cudworth.

The “Intelligible Ideas,” then, are eternal and necessary modes of the divine mind; and from the infinite seat they pass into the finite world in two distinct, yet related ways: by an act of God’s Will, things are called into existence of which they became the essences; by a lending of His Spirit to centers of dependent being, and communication of

His Consciousness, they become the intuitive lights of reason and Conscience for all free natures: and thus, they guide us, on one line, to the true reading of the universe; and on the other, to the immediate sympathy of God. Hence it is that all men have the same fundamental ideas, to form the common ground both of intellectual communion and of moral Co-operation.<sup>17</sup>

That last sentence is basic. There we see how the synthesis of Christian ideas with the theme of the *a priori*, with the rationalistic dogma of the commonness of Reason, lays the groundwork for the modern secular belief in the possibility of Community apart from a common allegiance to the Rule of Christ. Here we have the major historical factor in the rise of an Enlightenment idea of human society based on a common Reason. Here we have the explanation of the strong American faith in the common community undertakings, and the abhorrence of all specifically Christian social and political actions. It is not difficult to see that we are here well

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17. James Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891), Vol. II, p. 446.

on the way to Enlightenment deification of human reason, to its religion of reason, which was nothing more than a supposedly pure morality, i.e. morality without religion, and to its confident reliance upon civic virtues and civic institutions and civic education. The painful thing to realize is that movements in the Christian Church paved the way, by giving in to the synthesis mind. And the synthesis mind still seeks to cooperate in these “common” efforts.

### **Influence on New England Puritanism**

This synthesis mind of the Cambridge Platonists helped greatly to undermine the faith of the New England Puritans. It used to be said that one of the great mysteries in religious history is the quick deterioration of New England Puritanism. More recently, however, we have begun to be aware of some of the reasons for the sudden collapse. In the course of the last couple of decades men like Samuel Eliot Morison, Perry Miller, and Joseph Haroutunian (*Piety Versus Moralism*)<sup>18</sup> have added new comprehension to what took place.

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18. Joseph Haroutunian *Piety Versus Moralism* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964).



From the beginning Puritanism was not the same as Genevan Calvinism: a strong dose of late medieval Wycliffe-like content was present.<sup>19</sup> The standard authorities of the Puritans were more often than not Protestant scholastics like Keckermann and Alsted, rather than Calvin. A form of intellectualism quickly arose in New England. It was not long before men were finding their *formulations* of the doctrine more the matter of faith than the great scriptural verities themselves. There was an almost naive fascination with Reason, and the logic of Peter Ramus was their tool. Moreover, the formulations were often more after the fashion of the Cambridge Platonists than has, until very recently, been recognized. Cambridge Platonism was *prevalent* quite early. It was the source of Jonathan Edwards' idealism.

Jonathan Edwards is a controversial figure. Many Calvinists think of him as a great Calvinist. I suppose it all depends on what you mean by Calvinist. If one applies a narrowly theological crite-

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19. See, for example, Thomas Hall, *The Religious Background of American Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930).

tion one will get one picture. The fact is that Edwards was influenced by the Cambridge Platonists, Malebranche and Berkeley, Locke and Newton, at least as far as the supposed world of Nature (!) is concerned. The Great Awakening (1734-35) to which he so greatly contributed was a message of redemption for the individual heart and called for individual fruits of righteousness. But of the apostate patterns of thought at work in the social-economic-political life of his time Edwards had little or nothing to say. Yet New England was rapidly becoming involved in the ways of the Old World, striving for commercial success, competing for profits, etc. The spirit of European nationalism, capitalism, and rationalism, with its apparatus of political and legal theory, was everywhere taking possession of the hearts and lives of men. The influence of the synthesis made Edwards impotent to deal with this baleful drift. At the critical moment there was no integral Christian witness to stem the tide running towards the Enlightenment theory of the founders of the American Federal Government.

### **Scottish Realism and Its Effects**

The second movement I want to discuss for just a moment is known as Scottish Realism, a movement which had a devastating influence upon American Presbyterian circles. The person of Jonathan Edwards provides the transition from the one to the other and the connection of New England Puritanism with Mid-Atlantic Presbyterianism. In 1722 Edwards, a Yale man, had accepted a call to a Scottish Presbyterian church in New York. In 1708 the colony of Connecticut, following the opinion of Stoddard, had adopted the Saybrook Platform, by which regional associations of ministers were set up. From then on, that colony so closely approximated the Presbyterian system that very cordial relations sprang up with the new Presbyterian centers of New York and New Jersey. At the end of his life again Edwards served briefly as president of the College of New Jersey, which was to become Princeton University.

Before those first years of the eighteenth century we know very little of Presbyterians in the American colonies. The Scottish Presbyterians, who had been encouraged to colonize northern Ireland

a century before (the Scotch-Irish, the group to which your speaker belongs), began, under the economic and religious suppression that characterized the beginning of Queen Anne's reign, to undertake a mighty emigration to the American colonies about 1710.

The beginning of the eighteenth century was a critical time for Scotland. Since the Union with England in 1707, Deism and Enlightenment ideas generally spread rapidly there. These influences were quickly felt among the Scotch-Irish in Ireland and in the American colonies.

The new century also saw a veritable "Scottish Renaissance," which placed the Scottish universities in the very forefront of European culture. Sons of the Church had a great deal to do with it. But, as in other countries, a division arose in the Church between the Evangelicals (who sympathized with the Whitefield revivals and rued the passing of the older Calvinism) and the Moderates (who, though nominally orthodox, tended to emphasize eloquent preaching, ethics, natural theology, scholarship and free philosophic inquiry). By the middle of the century the Moderates had gained possession of the

universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh. At this point, the “Scottish school” of philosophy emerges. Of it, Sydney Ahlstrom of Yale University wrote in a recent article in the periodical *Church History*:

...it is more accurate to see the Scottish philosophers as a liberal vanguard, even as theological revolutionaries, than to preserve the traditional picture of genteel conservatives bringing reason to the service of a decadent orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Surrender of the Reformed Faith**

Jonathan Edwards, who had, you recall, come down to be president of the College of New Jersey, died in 1758. Ten years later, in 1768, John Witherspoon came to America to assume the presidency of the College. Though himself an Evangelical, he introduced Thomas Reid (1710-96) and Scottish realism as the tool by which orthodox theology could be defended against Humean scepticism, Deism and French revolutionary ideas. Yet in its views on rea-

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20. Sydney Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History*, (American Society of Church History), vol. 24, p. 259.

son, natural theology, conscience, the freedom of the will, and virtue, Scottish realism is itself a kind of practical rationalism. For that reason, it quickly had taken over Harvard's new Divinity School, and had become a part of much early Unitarianism. It had also become the philosophical tool *par excellence* of the New England theology that followed upon Edwards and the Great Awakening, a movement which culminated in Nathaniel William Taylor, professor of theology in Yale Divinity School.

In the light of all that, it is passing strange that it also came to be adopted by Archibald Alexander, the first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary, and by Charles Hodge, his pupil, whose textbook *Systematic Theology* I still used as a main textbook in Westminster Seminary.<sup>21</sup> From Hodge the ideas of the movement permeated American Presbyterianism. Let me quote the *Church History* article of Ahlstrom once more.

Consider, for example, Alexander's *Outlines of Moral Science*, which Hodge, in lieu of any work on the

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21. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1872-73).

subject by himself, considered to be the epitome of correct ethical reasoning. Any reader unaware that its author was one of the nation's most inflexible champions of the Old School Calvinism would assume on reading this book by itself, that it was written, perhaps, by some mild English Latitudinarian bent on mediating the views of Butler, Reid and Price. What is important here, though, is that these attitudes brought into Hodge's *Systematic Theology* what one Dutch Calvinist called "the stains of Humanism." The foundations of Hodge's ethic and his conception of natural theology are Scottish rather than Calvinistic.<sup>22</sup>

(The Dutch Calvinist to whom Ahlstrom refers is actually our own Dr. Danhof.) Ahlstrom goes on to point out that in the orthodox seminaries theology "lost its Reformation Bearings."<sup>23</sup> He sees this – I think correctly – as partly attributable to the humanistic orientation of the Hutcheson-Reid tradition. To quote again:

As this philosophy was adopted, the fervent  
theo-centricity of Calvin... was sacrificed...

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22. Op. cit., p. 266.

23. Ibid., p. 268.

Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth... The adoption of the benign and optimistic anthropology of the Scottish Moderates by American Calvinists veiled the very insights into human nature which were a chief strength of Calvin's theology. Scottish Realism accelerated the long trend toward rational theology... there resulted a neo-rationalism... Reformed theology was thus emptied of its most dynamic element. A kind of rationalistic *rigor mortis* set in.<sup>24</sup>

And to think that we have to be told this by a professor in Yale Divinity School!

To bring to an end this story about the Scottish realists, I want to quote once more from Ahlstrom.

In conclusion we may say, therefore, that the profound commitment of orthodox theology to the apologetical keeping of the Scottish philosophy made traditional doctrines so lifeless and static that a new theological turn was virtually inevitable. Certainly there is no mystery as to why end-of-century theology in America turned with such enthusiasm to evolutionary idealism, the social gospel, and the

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24. Ibid., p. 269.



“religion of feeling.” It was in search of the relevant and the dynamic.<sup>25</sup>

### **William James’ Comment**

An interesting light on this whole sad tale of the influence of synthesis-thinking upon orthodox Christianity is shed by a remark William James made in his *Pragmatism*:

Religious philosophy, in our day and generation is, among us English-reading people, of two main types. One of these is more radical and aggressive, the other has more the air of fighting a slow retreat. By the more radical wing of religious philosophy I mean the so-called transcendental idealism of the Anglo-Hegelian school, the philosophy of such men as Green, the Cairds, Bosanquet, and Royce. This philosophy has greatly influenced the more studious members of our protestant ministry. It is pantheistic, and undoubtedly it has already blunted the edge of the traditional theism in Protestantism at large. That theism remains, however. It is the lineal descendant, through one stage of concession after another, of the dogmatic scholastic theism still

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25. Ibid., p. 269.

taught rigorously in the seminaries of the catholic church. For a long time, it used to be called among us the philosophy of the Scottish school. It is what I meant by the philosophy that has the air of fighting a slow retreat. Between the encroachments of the Hegelians and other philosophers of the 'Absolute,' on the one hand, and those of the scientific evolutionists and agnostics, on the other, the men that give us this kind of a philosophy, James Martineau, Professor Bowne, Professor Ladd and others, must feel themselves rather tightly squeezed. Fair-minded and candid as you like, this philosophy is not radical in temper. It is eclectic, a thing of compromise, that seeks a *modus vivendi* above all things. It accepts the facts of Darwinism, the facts of cerebral physiology, but it does nothing active or enthusiastic with them. It lacks the victorious and aggressive note. It lacks *prestige* in consequence; whereas absolutism has a certain *prestige* due to the more radical style of it.<sup>26</sup>

James has caught the spirit of the synthesis-mind. "Through one stage of concession after another." In Cambridge Platonism and Scottish realism, the integral POWER of the Word of God

26. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 25-26.

was not present to hold the hearts of men in the Truth. The heart of the synthesis-thinker is rather inclined to look to the world around him to seek a *modus vivendi*. Lacking the Truth, the synthesis-mind occupies itself with seeking “moments” of truth in the Lie. Sooner or later – lacking divine intervention – it will find itself in *the grip of the Lie*.

### **Rejection of All Synthesis Required**

To understand Synthesis perfectly, and its consequences, just imagine what would have happened if our second representative or Office-bearing man, Jesus Christ, when, like Adam, He was tempted of Satan in the wilderness, had taken each of the devil’s tempting words and looked for, even expressed a measure of agreement with, the “moments” of truth in them (without which the lie cannot even exist since it is only a Distortion of the Truth)! That is precisely what our first parent did, and fell from his place. But the heart of the man Christ was held in the grip of the Truth, and He gave to each of Satan’s tempting words the *integral answer of the Truth*. Because of what He did it is possible for the apostle to enjoin us to “stand firm, then, and do not let

yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

I must close. I hope you appreciate better the Reformed heritage you have brought from the Netherlands. For the faithful witness of men like Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper and the others who have followed in their line has served to lift us up out of the vast, seemingly inexorable Drift of “western Christianity” and to bring us back to the simple and charged heart of the Christian religion: Your servant, My Lord. It is this that at first makes it difficult for all of you to find your way in your new homeland. But when you have seen the nature of God’s THESIS and of the variety of human ANTITHESES, there can be no hesitation as to the course we must pursue. No *Synthesis*; not even in the form of the emasculated message: Jesus saves. But a “seeing” from out of the religious Center of how the lines of reformational activity are to be drawn throughout the length and breadth of God’s creation, to bring our subjective life integrally into conformity with the Law of creation, the creation-ordinances. That is the Message of God’s Kingdom of *Righteousness!*

Permit me to close by quoting Prof. K.J. Popma, whose Dutch I translate:

Christ makes of His people a second division in His army of which He is himself the Commander and first division... He goes forth, conquering, and *carries His people along with Him in His victory... links them to His achieving of the mastery.* Therefore, it is always worth every effort, therefore it is worth our very life, to establish Christian schools, to strive for Christian politics and a Christian social order, to aim at Christian scientific pursuits and Christian philosophy. This is worth everything; for sharing in Christ's achieving of the mastery makes all human endeavors radiant and glorious amid the pitifulness of our efforts, the weakness of our undertakings and the short-sightedness of our management.

Where each of us is ready to say, "I would be willing to die for that," there is reason to rejoice that the Lord has already turned the course of our history. The future of Canada and of this North American continent lies in the decision of our hearts.



# 5

## SCIENTIFIC & PRE-SCIENTIFIC

### *Lecture 4*

*1961*

MR. CHAIRMAN, I WANT to thank you for your gracious words of introduction. Further, I wish both to express the deep satisfaction I feel at being here at this second Unionville Study Conference and, in particular, to thank the responsible authorities for the honor they bestowed upon me when for the second time they invited me to be one of your lecturers.

I must confess, Mr. Chairman, that I am still rubbing my eyes and trying to realize that Unionville days are here again. It is remarkable, the hold

that this place has come to have upon us. Yet I could not say that it is strange. What took place here just one year ago has been occupying many of us in one way or another ever since. For it was no small thing, that first Unionville Conference. We who were here during those all too brief days in that beautiful beginning of September, 1959, witnessed the POWER of God at work to change the direction of student lives.

### **The First “Unionville”**

It was here that Christian students became aware of the fact that their being students did not in the first or deepest sense constitute them (as for purposes of statistics) a certain class in Canadian society, but is before all else to be seen as an historical unfolding of the richly varied structure of the Kingdom of God as it comes to expression in this land. That, in a word, was Unionville, 1959: a deepening realization that the calling to be a student is an aspect of the dynamically developing Kingdom of God. In this way we rediscovered that the roots of our lives are not fed in some particular civil society called Canada or the United States of America – such a



view only gives rise to sickly nationalisms – but rather in that heavenly fellowship of faith, in that unity in the Truth, that is only to be found in Christ Jesus the Lord. We acquired perspective here, insight. We learned to ‘place’ things, to see what is root and what are the branches. The Word of God opened up to us here in a new and radical way, with the result that we saw who we are and what we are doing. We saw ourselves in the deepest dimension of our lives as SERVANTS OF GOD in the Kingdom of Christ, to whom the WORD of God has been given in order that we may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, also in our civil communities, and also in our scholarship.

### **Fruits of “Unionville”**

Not only the reports that have reached me of lives changed and the letters which I have received, but in general a firming up that I have been able to notice in Canada of our resolve to live, also as students, by the light of the Word of God, – these things have convinced me that Unionville was indeed a crucial turning point, in the first place for many of us as individuals, but – and this is most important – for

all of us Christian students collectively. Since the first Unionville Conference there has been a more conscious taking up of our collective task as Christian students. In the interval between that conference and this one at least two student organizations have been set up, one at the University of Toronto and another at the University of Western Ontario in London. They are young organizations, hesitant, not always sure of exactly how they must go; they need proper guidance desperately; but they are determined, because they were born of a genuine faith that the Word of God does direct our student path. This, I would propose to you, represents substantial growth in the Kingdom of God in Canada. And it would not surprise me at all if one of the early fruits of our Unionville Conferences would be an organization of students from the Maritimes to British Columbia, similar to the Calvinistic student movement in the Netherlands, which would foster throughout the year and more systematically than we can do now, a deepened understanding of what it is to be a Christian student, what it is to study in a Christian way, what it is to build up an integrated body of scientific knowledge that is informed by

the light of God's Word. After last year, who would dare say that God will not be pleased to give us just that?

There is one more comment that I wish to make. Since Unionville I, there has been a noticeable heightening of joy in our lives. I know, because I have repeatedly observed it. Perhaps it would be better to speak of "blessedness" rather than of "joy"; for one may be sad or distressed and still be blessed. This too is not strange when we stop to think about what Prof. K. J. Popma has written in the first chapter of his fine book, *Eerst de Jood maar ook de Griek*.<sup>1</sup> Men are called to a task and to blessedness. But blessedness is not a reward that follows upon the fulfilling of the task; it accompanies the doing of it. Note Ps. 1 and Ps. 119:1, 2 and the beatitudes of Christ. What we have experienced during and since our first conference is just this, that it is blessed to assume in obedience the task given. No wonder we cherish such keen expectations for this second conference. And now, here we are together again, this time with many new faces, at Mrs. Mad-

1. K.J. Popma, *Eerst de Jood maar ook de Griek* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1950).

sen's Cherry Hill Farm, at Unionville.

**“Unionville” a Matter of Principle**

Mr. Chairman, you will understand from what I have said why I wish to address you as I did last year, as Young People of the Reformation in Canada. It is not blood, Dutch or otherwise, it is not a particular national background as such that brings us together here, but the Reformation faith. It is always ultimately a common faith that brings men together and establishes any genuine community. And such ultimate faiths are not a matter of geography, climate and historical development. That is why classical humanists, logical positivists, neo-thomists, and socialists can be found in all parts of the world. It is why we here, though still in large part immigrants from the Netherlands, can constitute a genuinely Canadian or American movement. But then it is extremely important, of course, that we make clear by our actions that we are not interested in the first place in extending Dutch ways of thinking and Dutch customs and institutions, and that we clearly lay the accent on our faith and our principle.

Mr. Chairman, I consider this matter to be of such fundamental importance for our young Christian immigrants that I should like, with your permission, to take just a moment more to say something further about it. Let me reiterate, it is not Dutch custom or national history as such that is our concern here in Canada, but solely *the supra-temporal Principle of our lives.*

### **A Timely Illustration**

I think I can illustrate what I particularly have in mind by relating an incident that took place earlier this summer. With my family I was enjoying a badly needed vacation in eastern Ontario. One day at one of the nearby lakes, I fell into conversation with a man who proved not only to be the head of a primary school in that vicinity but also to have occupied some position in the national government in Ottawa. We chatted in friendly fashion for a few minutes about the differences between Canadian and American high schools, but when he found that I, an American, had some kind of connection with Dutch immigrants in Canada, his attitude changed somewhat. First, he asked me if it were true that

the Dutch in a certain nearby community were going to open a Christian school in September. I told him that I had heard that they would. At once he showed signs of apprehension and came directly to his point: "Well," he said, "you are an American. What do you think will become of Canada if every national group that comes here proceeds to set up its own schools? Why, we'll have chaos here." He spoke with some feeling. My reply to him was, "But most of the groups that come to Canada do not do this sort of thing, do they?" And I paused for a moment for that to sink in. And then I went on, "Moreover, these schools are not really Dutch schools, even though they may seem to you at present to be that because of the natural initial language difficulties. They are not the transplanting of some kind of national institution. They are not even, like Lutheran and Roman Catholic schools, a sort of extension of a church denomination." I know that this is a touchy point, because in the States too in the last century we had almost as many Lutheran churches as there are northern European countries. "These schools," I told this Canadian educator, "are based on deep convictions of faith about what our

human life is and how it is to be lived; they are dictated by principle. They are organized by Christian believers of Protestant conviction, and ideally all Canadian families who share the faith of the Protestant Reformation can participate in them.”

### **Our Principle and the Alternatives**

“But we give religious instruction in our schools,” this educator countered. I showed that I was puzzled about how a school that is public can give religious instruction that would be satisfactory to a particular faith, and asked him what he understood by religious education. Then I knew that he would not be able to satisfy me. For, you know, there are only two answers that can be given to this question by the defenders of the public school. Such people understand by religious education either (1) moralism, i.e. the inculcating of certain moral attitudes of behavior supposedly common to all the great religions of the world but considered as detached from the religious tenets of any one of them and valid in their own right as moral perceptions, or (2) instruction in the history of the world’s great religions. The first position was held by at least

one of the men who helped carve out the American democracy, viz. Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson once wrote, “We should not intermeddle with the particular dogmas in which all religions differ, and which are *totally unconnected with morality*” (italics mine). It was his position that society will best be served by observing those moral precepts in which all religions agree. “But,” he wrote in his famous *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket, nor breaks my leg.”<sup>2</sup> For Jefferson *true religion is morality*, and morality stands on its own feet. This belief is one of the deepest strata of American conviction about its public life.

But the Canadian educator with whom I was talking represented the second solution: he explained that in their schools they give lessons in the history of religion, and that they do it because they believe religious instruction to be essential and foundational for a soundly functioning democracy.

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2. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), p. 152.



In reply I said that it was not clear to me just exactly how by their telling of stories they proposed to develop that soundness of life necessary for his properly functioning democracy.

### **The Word of God Our Principle**

And that, my young friends, is the whole issue between the defenders of the public schools and us. With respect to the one argument, there is no morality that is not rooted in the Divine Imperative; with respect to the second, stories, even though they be stories about religion, do not bolster sagging democracies, – or empires either, for that matter. To be whole-heartedly committed to a belief is very different from observing that same belief from the outside. What is needed for the direction of life is *faith*, a hearty acceptance of, a binding commitment to the Word that God has given to be the Guide or Norm or Principle of our life. For that Word is after all simply God Himself directing Himself graciously to us, addressing us in His peculiarly sovereign Power. His Word is a power that begets to new life (I Pet. 1:23. This passage with surrounding verses also refutes Jefferson's position

about the relation between religion and morality); the divine Word is that Arché the Greek philosophers were forever seeking after, the starting-point of our (new) life that at the same time governs, directs its future course, in short, our *Principle*.

### **Our Debate with Our Times**

The conversation that I have been relating to you came to an end at this point, but later I got to thinking it all over. In one sense I could very well understand the anxiety of this man. If our neighbors should get from us the idea that we are struggling to erect Christian schools, Christian labor organizations and Christian political parties just because it is an old Dutch custom, then their irritation and, where they see our work as a threat to national integration or as positively divisive, their open hostility could easily be understood, perhaps in a sense even justified. And that is how this man was looking at us. Yet for us to give such an impression would be a betrayal of our highest calling. Our debate with our times is no less than a debate about *principle*. This word may not be popular or understood in our day, but what it refers to is real. Let us simply

recall the Latin word *principium*, meaning “beginning,” “commencement,” “origin.” The debate of our times in which we must all mingle is a debate about the ultimate faith that, whether recognized as such or not, directs our goings by taking possession of the “beginnings” of our lives (our hearts).

### **Principle, the Question of Our Time**

As a result of the conversation we had had I felt that the man had been relieved of at least some of his anxiety about a divided Canada, but, particularly important, that the debate had irrevocably been shifted to where it properly belongs. Principle is something still somewhat respected in western society as that ultimate loyalty of men which the state may not touch. It will have to remain that way if we are to be distinguished from totalitarian thinkers. It will have to remain that way even though the fact is inescapable that men are deeply divided on this matter of ultimate faith. There are only two ways to do away with this ultimate dividedness of the human race. One is to attempt to create a common faith by conviction or hidden pressure. This effort has been made on a grand scale in our modern cen-

turies following upon the Wars of Religion, and it appears to be a thorough-going failure. The other way is by a frank surrender of our cherished democratic freedom. Everywhere today human society is fundamentally disturbed by the conflicting principles which men accept for their lives. I believe it is the basic question of human life, one which only the living and powerful Word of God can elucidate.

### **The Seriousness of the Situation**

In this critical situation, Mr. Chairman, the fact that I return again this year in my lectures to a consideration of the basic principle of the Christian's life should require no apology. Nothing else urges itself more constantly upon our attention than this. A Cornell University sociologist reported this year that American college students are "politically disinterested and apathetic." Her explanation was significant: they are apathetic, she said, because "there are no clearly defined programs around which to rally, no clearly defined answers to the problems which their generation confronts." She might have said that both they and their times lack an acknowledged guiding principle. Our theater has no vitality

because it lacks any conviction about the nature of man and his life. Indeed, our whole western society seems to be drifting without any sense of direction, not only in the foreign policies of the several nations, but in all its aspects. Bertrand Russell has written somewhere that the dogmatic systems and norms of behavior no longer have the hold on men they once had, that men are often in real doubt as to what is good and bad and even ask themselves whether good and evil are anything more than old superstition, and that if they try to solve such problems these appear to be too difficult for them. His sobering summary conclusion is that men cannot discover a single clear aim to be striven after or a single clear principle that could lead them. Evidently, if we Christians are to make a clear and relevant witness in the second half of the twentieth century, we shall have to be clear about this matter of principle.

### **This Year's Lectures**

The lectures that I propose to deliver to you in this conference, Mr. Chairman, presuppose, in a way,

my lectures of last year.<sup>3</sup> Yet I trust they will be sufficiently understood even by those of you who are not yet acquainted with the work we did here at that time. The lecture for this morning is entitled SCIENTIFIC AND PRE-SCIENTIFIC. In my second lecture I propose to talk about SPHERE-SOVEREIGNTY.

Mr. Chairman, I shall now proceed to enter upon the discussion of our first topic. Though the title SCIENTIFIC AND PRE-SCIENTIFIC may seem somewhat prosaic, I must say that I can scarcely imagine a subject which it would be more important to discuss with Christian students than the one we now have before us, especially when the Christian students in question are compelled, as many of you here are, to attend one of our modern secular universities.

### **Importance of Our First Subject**

From my observation of Christian students over a period now of slightly more than twenty-five years, I am convinced that almost without exception the student is lost to integral Christianity not some-

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3. See above, Lectures I-III.

where down the years of his university experiences, but at the very outset. Susanne K. Langer is right when she says in her book, *Philosophy in a New Key*, that the way in which a philosophical movement formulates its problems is more significant than the solutions it subsequently arrives at.<sup>4</sup> “Its answers,” she writes, “establish an edifice of facts; but its questions make the frame in which its picture of facts is plotted. They make more than the frame; they give the angle of perspective, the palette, the style in which the picture is drawn – everything except the subject. In our questions lie our *principles of analysis*, and our answers may express whatever those principles are able to yield.”<sup>5</sup> So it is also, I am convinced, with the unsuspecting Christian student who enters one of our universities. For the university at its very portals formulates, as it were, for the incoming student the problem of life.

The innocent freshman does not realize that the very existence of the university involves the philosophical problem as to its place, as to the place of

4. Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).
5. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

science (*die Wissenschaft*) in the whole of life. He is, as a matter of fact, caught unawares at a very weak moment in his life. His coming to the university marks a transition to a new period of his life: he becomes more independent and in his enlarged freedom looks to the world of science as somehow his mature life. He is fired with a zeal to master some one or more branches of scientific knowledge. He is open to the influences of the scientific mind. At this critical juncture only at his peril will our fledgling look upon the university as merely a collection of scholars engaged in what to him appears to be the very high calling of scientific pursuits or even, as he will soon hear it called, the pursuit of truth, and overlook thereby the fact that the university is also a concentrated microcosm of the modern mind. For the university is also and inevitably an association of men, and in spite of so much modern theory, men are more than scientific minds: they are believers. The men who staff our modern universities largely share in the faith of the modern world.

### **Scientism Is Faith in Science**

In order to explain the predicament of our hypo-



thetical freshman I must right here say something briefly about that faith. The modern age has been described as the age of science, and also as the age of revolution. If you will permit me, I will at once substitute in the first description the word “scientism” for “science” because I think that it more exactly expresses the sense of what has largely taken place in our modern centuries. Only the further development of my lecture can justify this substitution. And if on some future occasion I may have the pleasure of addressing you again I shall try to show you that there is also an intimate connection between scientism and revolution.<sup>6</sup> At the present moment, however, I am interested only in the former of the two characterizations of our age. Just a word about it.

The word “scientism” is one of those “ism” words we talked about last year. The “ism” suggests that an exaggerated emphasis has been put upon

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6. This promise was partially fulfilled in my Unionville Lectures of 1961. They are now published as *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1974). See especially p. 64ff.

something in our theoretical explanation of that thing. Thus the word “scientism” suggests that in our modern theory too great a role has been assigned to “*scientia*,” a role, that is, greater than it has been given to play in the role by reason of the divine ordinances. The word “*scientia*” itself is a Latin equivalent for our English “knowledge.” We find it, for example, at the beginning of the second chapter of the first book of Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitatio Christi*: “*It is natural that man should desire knowledge; but what doth knowledge avail him without the fear of God?*”<sup>7</sup> Important to notice is the use of “*scientia*” for “knowledge” where the writer is warning his readers against the dangers of intellectualism in religion. This Thomas no doubt had Thomas Aquinas in mind, and the whole ensuing tribe of scholastic philosophers; for the first part of the sentence I quoted is, as you will perhaps have recognized, a literal translation of the first sentence of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. In his excellent little book *Humanism and Theology* Werner Jaeger writes about this passage, “When Thomas a Kempis repeats these words

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7. Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio Christi* [English translation] (Ilkey, England: Scholar Press, 1977).

and adds: ‘But what is the good of human wisdom without the fear of God?’ he obviously intends to hit the pride of the scholastic philosophers of his time and their heated controversies about dogmatic questions which they carried on in their classrooms with the methods of Aristotelian dialectic.”<sup>8</sup> Thus “*scientia*” here conveys a scientifically discursive kind of knowledge which Thomas a Kempis contrasts with the knowledge that comes from hearing the eternal Word spoken to us.<sup>9</sup> I think it is significant, by way of contrast, that when Calvin speaks about the knowledge of God at the beginning of his Institutes, he does not use this word “*scientia*” but that other Latin word for knowledge, “*cognitio*.”<sup>10</sup> The latter word appears to have been free of undesirable connotations.

From what has now been said you will have gathered that the word “scientism” means a theoret-

8. Werner Jaeger, *Humanism and Theology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1943), p. 14.
9. See Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*, Chapter 3, Section 2.
10. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, see the Latin headings of Books I and II.

ical view that exaggerates the place that science and scientific knowledge actually have in life. It is in this sense that we shall be using the word in the sequel. You can see at once that scientism, as a “view that exaggerates” is not the same as science. It is rather a faith conviction about science, and a wrong one (exaggeration) at that. Science, the scientific method, does not, cannot give rise to scientism. The latter, as I hope to show, is a philosophical viewpoint like idealism or materialism; it is a view about the *place* of science in the whole of our life. Basically, scientism is modern man’s worship, the expression of his apostate religion. Here and there, and especially among more recent irrationalistic thinkers, there has been a recognition of the limited sphere of scientific knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

### **Illustrations of Scientistic Attitude**

What concretely is meant by scientism? Let me give a couple of preliminary examples. In the modern

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11. See, for example, Karl Jaspers’ reply to Rudolf Bultmann in Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), p. 6.

world generally the criterion of everything that is good and worthy of our attention has been whether it is “scientific.” The modern world is convinced that science holds the last word. For John Dewey and many others there must come in the 20th century a reconstruction of philosophy because previous attempts at philosophizing had all been ‘pre-scientific’ Positivism and logical positivism, the philosophical movements that in recent decades have all but dominated the universities on our continent, and which have tried desperately to make philosophy “scientific.” Rudolf Bultmann’s now widely discussed method of “*Entmythologisierung*” (de-mythologizing) would remove from the biblical writings all traces of their primitive, “pre-scientific” world-picture, in order to allow the divine revelation itself to meet the “scientific” test. Scientific knowledge, i.e. knowledge gained by scientific methods and thus meeting the test of those methods, has been acclaimed in great areas of our modern world as the only proper and adequate avenue to the truth. Today war must be “scientific,” we must have “scientific” breakfasts, “scientific” toothbrushes, “scientific” sex education for the schools,

“scientific” love-making for our young couples, and a “scientific” way of planning our families and rearing our children. We even have “scientific” socialists. Both the Nazis and the Marxists appealed to science for their opposite views of human nature. But also, our American former ambassador Joseph E. Davies interpreted his laissez-faire conception of human nature in biological terms. In Great Britain the official pacifist movement published a pamphlet entitled *Is Pacifism Scientific or Sentimental?*, the conclusion of which was that pacifism and not militarism receives scientific sanction and is therefore to be approved by *modern* man. In the May 5, 1958 issue of *Time* (p. 36) the famous physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer is reported to have told the *Paris Presse*: “I believe that only a world council of wise men can assure peace on a scientific basis. Throughout the world, scientists are ready and eager to co-operate in such a project. I believe that we can and will eventually cure atomic terror just as doctors have succeeded in combatting malaria – by banding together.” And so we could go on. Why, it has got so bad that we are almost afraid to ask our neighbor whether he saw the beautiful

sunset, because he might just be a scientist and look disdainfully down upon us in our primitive world from out of his superior knowledge that, scientifically speaking – for him the equivalent of truthfully speaking – there is no sunset.

### **Scientism’s Strange Reversal of Things**

If in all this all that was meant was that scientific research can contribute something to enrich our knowledge of these things, we could and would have no objection. Science is an important gift of God to man. But what is meant goes far deeper than can perhaps be felt from our last remark about the sunset. Science is here not something to enrich a knowledge we already have; science is everything, at least, everything that is respectable. *Normal experiences of life must be broken down and re-formed according to the demands of the scientific point of view...* As we saw in the examples given, “pre-scientific” was used with the sense “before the advent of the scientific method, which has now in these last days opened up to us the possibility of arriving at truth.” That is to say, “pre-scientific” is here equivalent to “unscientific,” “worthless.” What

is “pre-scientific” cannot be related to the truth.

We have here that reversal of things that is the strange heart of scientism. Life and experience, which always precede science, are second; science, which always must be second, is first. Descartes, who is generally taken as the one who introduced the modern manner of philosophizing, is the best example of what I mean. His method consists in having the scientific (geometrical) reason call all previous experience (i.e. experience previous to the application of the scientific method) into question until that scientific reason itself should discover some scientifically ascertainable absolute starting-point for experience. From this scientifically fixed starting-point, the reason (scientific, of course) proceeds to build up, in that supposedly scientific way Descartes, Spinoza and others called more *geometrico*, a new experience that would meet the scientific test. This latter experience, then, because it supposedly meets the scientific test, is the genuine experience. Here is the world and the word of truth. This is what we mean by scientism’s reversal of the natural order. It replaces the experience of a life-time and the practical wisdom of the ages;



it is a substitute for religion. In his preface to Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, Louis Wirth, a prominent sociologist, writes: "...the voice of science [is] heard with a respect approximating the sanctity which formerly was accorded only to the authoritarian, religious pronouncements."<sup>12</sup> His words show that scientism is not science but the way we *hear* science, our religious giving of our hearts to science.

### **A Critical Situation for the Christian Student**

This scientism is still essentially the faith of the men comprising the teaching staffs of our modern universities. In some individuals that faith appears in a more militant and virulent form; in others it is more a placid, unquestioned basic motor force covertly operative in the way their lives are lived. In the university, as in the modern world, this standpoint of modern faith is not so much argued as presupposed. It may also be argued somewhere along the line, but that is not the most dangerous

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12. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955), p. xii.

moment in the student's life. For by the time the question comes to be argued the student's heart has already been claimed. *All he now does is accept the argued position as "self-evident."*

What can our incoming freshman of a moment ago possibly be expected to know of all these long-standing issues, so momentous for the outcome of his life? Practically nothing. He simply is not aware that the university is a concentrated cross-section of the modern world, and that it will not only teach him the science he so eagerly covets just at this period of his life, but will also feed him large doses of a view of life which sees the pursuit of scientific knowledge as the human ideal, leading to human blessedness.

### **A Personal Illustration of This**

Perhaps I can heighten the vividness of the impression I am trying to create by telling you something of my own experience as a very immature student at the University of Pennsylvania a quarter of a century ago (now half a century). In the fall of the year I entered a course in the history of modern philosophy, and our professor, a brilliant logician, began

at once to discuss Descartes with us and his method of radical doubt that I have already referred to. Today we would say that this method of teaching was “existential”: he used our class as an illustration of Descartes’ meaning. “Right in this class,” he said to us, “conflicting dogmatic beliefs of traditional religious groups are represented: orthodox and liberal Judaism, Roman Catholicism, orthodox and liberal Protestantism, humanism, atheism. Now, how are we who represent these faiths going to talk with each other? When we begin to argue with each other we find that our traditional beliefs are not so clearly evident to us as we had hitherto supposed. Moreover, on what common basis can we discuss the ‘truth’ of our several faiths unless we are all willing to abandon for the moment the dogmatic starting-points of our several religious commitments and to find another starting-point that is universally acceptable to the scientific reason?” At the end of the period, as we were already leaving the room, the professor dared us to free ourselves of our past and make a new beginning on a rational basis that would be acceptable to all reasonable persons.

What would you have done? I was a serious student; I wanted more than anything else at that moment to enter into the beckoning mysteries of the history of modern philosophy. Well, I remember vividly that as I was walking home that noon, I happened to pass through a small city park. I stopped and stood by a tree in the center of the park completely absorbed in my sober thoughts. I took out my pocketknife and began to carve my initials in the bark of the tree, while deep within me I was saying to myself, Should I or should I not; dare I or don't I dare? That was to say, Should I throw overboard the faith in which I had been reared – probably it would only be for a moment, anyhow – and begin again, in the scientific manner of my professor? Wasn't that, after all, the only thoroughly honest way? If my religion was true it certainly would stand the test of a scientific method. Or would it?

I did not follow the advice of my professor, but I almost did, humanly speaking. Yet I must say this here: I did not know what was going on, and for years I was unable to say why it was not right to take the professor's "reasonable" dare. I know many

Christians who took similar advice, usually with the most disastrous consequences.

Permit me one more brief illustration. Many years later when I was doing graduate work in a research society at Harvard University it happened at a dinner that a professor suddenly looked up laughing into my face and asked if I could still believe that Jesus had gone “up” to heaven. He meant, of course, that with the modern scientific picture of the world that had arisen out of the work of Copernicus, Bruno, Kepler, Galileo, and others, “up” could be anywhere and thus nowhere in particular. By this time, I was more mature and knew something about what was going on. But the disdainful attitude still hurt; it was as if you were being cut off from any body of scholars that might be expected to do useful work.

### **The Heart of Our Weakness**

Every year, I am sure, a very large number of young students of Christian background succumb to the apparent attractions and alleged advantages of this aggressive scientism simply because they are not sufficiently believing and therefore not properly

critical. It is certainly the duty of pastors to make this general situation clear to those of their young people who go to the university. To learn scientific pursuits is one thing; to adopt a scientific outlook is quite another thing: *it is, in fact, to accept an alternative to Christianity*. For scientism is a belief about the principle of our life, which it finds in the clarity and apparent secure cogency of theoretical or scientific thought. On the other hand, the Bible as the Word of God declares that it is that principle, and I showed in my 1959 lectures how this is in general to be understood.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, the victory of scientism is the defeat of Christianity, and vice versa. When students of Christian background year-in and year-out naively accept the formulation which the modern university, mirroring the modern age, gives to the problem as to the principle of our life, the forces of the modern mind need not fear regular attendance at the churches. It is fully aware that it will receive the fattened calf in the very first year of the university. Present-day polls, for example, show a great majority of “Christian” people, who nevertheless think of Christianity in the relativistic,

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13. See above, Lecture I “Thesis.”

evolutionistic way.

I have said that these young people are not properly critical because they are not sufficiently believing. We might do well to ponder this remark. I shall not elaborate further upon it here.

### **Weakness Born of Accommodation**

The effectiveness of the Body of Christ in the world is greatly weakened by that other group of Christian students who in the struggle hold on somehow to a reduced religion of personal salvation but give in to the scientific spirit in the broader reaches of life. I wish particularly to signal this grave danger; therefore, I will be very concrete. I am thinking of a man who teaches in the natural sciences division of one of our larger American universities. He was raised in a genuinely Christian home and was graduated from one of our Christian colleges in the States. Today this man is very active in the organizing of student prayer meetings and in otherwise strengthening the personal faith of Christian students at his university. At the same time, he gladly associates himself with the view which sees science as limited to mathematically measured

or measurable “facts” and particularly as divorced from any philosophical and religious roots and constructions. Never would you be able to get this man to admit in so many words that a great part of our activity in the creation is divorced from the fall of man and from Christ and His redemption. Nevertheless, practically and without any theoretical reflection about its possibility, he accepts the modern view of the *autonomy* of scientific thought. Even here already there is open conflict in his life. But this man even believes that this modern view of the scientific enterprise is desirable because it makes possible some areas of human *community* in a world otherwise hopelessly divided. And here is that faith that science will redeem the world by breaking down boundaries of superstition and gradually setting up a human community in the truth, a faith that conflicts with what Scripture reveals about how Christ will establish His Kingdom of Truth. Hesitantly, because here he begins to feel that his ideas are getting out of hand, this man accepts the belief that as science goes on to conquer more and more of life’s areas and bring its enlightenment, the sphere of human community will progressively be



enlarged. Is this man a Christian or not? Of course, he is. Yet something blocks the working out of his faith, and for all practical purposes he is a modern scientific thinker. He has really gone over to positivism. The only thing that distinguishes him is that he sets up limits for his positivism: he holds that there is also an area of religion. Wholehearted service of Christ this man cannot know; for he thinks of "heart" pietistically, as the seat of the affective life over against the life of reason, and thus misses any integral conception of existence. In short, integral, biblical Christianity has departed his life. But his positivism too, like every religious faith, will go on making increasing claims upon his heart. This man is truly a house divided against itself. And for that reason, the power of the Word of God to renew all of life from out of the heart and to bring all things into subjection to the Christ of God simply cannot operate through him as it ought. Moreover, *his positivism will effectively keep him from understanding the revelation of God aright*. His life cannot be one of increasing sanctification. And in great areas of his life there will be no blessedness. Very often in life the more positivistic a Christian becomes, the more

he tries to right everything with prayer meetings. But what he needs is faith, and faith is obedience.

### **The Urgent Need of a Christian University**

Why have I spoken at such length about one man? Because I know that to a greater or less degree, he is a picture of most Christian university-trained young people who continue to show a scientific interest. This is right serious business. That is why I said at the very outset this morning that I could scarcely imagine a subject more important to discuss with Christian students than the one we have this morning. Let me say further that I can hardly imagine a better example of the need for an integrally Christian center of scholarly research and instruction on this North American continent. For our subject involves every one of the special sciences as well as philosophy, and above all a knowledge of God's revelation in Christ. Only a university community of scholars who are all alike committed to the integral or scriptural conception of Christianity and who are abreast of their times in a number of branches of scholarship can do the job that must be done to save our young people from what is daily

taking place. Let us pray for such a university; let us support the labors of the A.A.C.S. We need leaders who “see,” and we need them now. There is no time to lose.

**The Issue: the Relation between “Scientific” and “Pre-Scientific”**

This morning, of course, we cannot do everything. But I do wish to direct your attention in the remainder of the lecture more particularly to the relation that exists between what we have been calling “scientific” and “pre-scientific”.

We have been getting acquainted with the view that scientism takes of this relationship. It says that only what has been subjected to and re-formed by the scientific method is true and sure and good. And of course, the corollary of this is that what is not thus scientific is primitive or immature, false and unworthy, material for the scientific mind to remake to truth.

That is what was behind my reference to the sunset. The scientific thinker (not, be it noted, the scientific thinker!) has identified all proper knowledge with scientific knowledge, in particular with

the mathematical methods of physics or with other areas of science that attempt to apply its methods. When we look at the earth and the sun and their mutual relations in this particular manner, then there is no place for a sunset. The scientific thinker characteristically concludes that the concept "sunset" belongs to a primitive pre-scientific generation and straightway excludes it from the body of true and valid knowledge.

The same sort of thing was involved in the Harvard professor's laughing remark to me about the ascension of Christ. From the point of view of our present scientific conception of the motions of physical bodies in space, it is not possible to conceive of any absolute "up"; such a concept the scientific thinker would describe as "medieval" and "obscurantist."

### **Confusion Born of a Medieval Accommodation (Synthesis)**

We need to take a slightly closer look at what is involved here. What the medieval men had done was to accommodate scriptural revelation to an old Greek science. These men were fully familiar with

the biblical account of the earth in the book of Genesis as the place of God's covenantal and redemptive dealings with man, and with the second chapter of Genesis in particular, which reveals God's unusual concern for His creature, man. From that chapter they sensed that God had placed man in the center of the creation, and from that they sensed further that the earth is the great stage of the divine-human encounter. So far, these medieval men were correct. But then they went on to read this biblical revelation in the light of ancient Greek views (Aristotle and Ptolemy) about the "physical world." The result was that the earth was now conceived as the center of the world, a fixed center *in the physical-scientific sense*. Underneath it – in that same physical sense – lay hell, the fumes of which could sometimes be seen rising from crevices and fissures in the earth's floor. And above the earth were the several (seven of them) spheres in which the seven known planets (including the sun) revolved. Above the last of these spheres came the incorruptible firmament (no. 8), the outer limit of the physical world, not having the motion of the spheres. From this incorruptible firmament the fixed stars were thought to be suspend-

ed like lamps. Beyond this supposed limit of the physical world the mind's eye of medieval man discerned the Ninth Heaven, to which the saints were rapt, the Primum Mobile or Crystalline sphere. At the very top of the picture there was the Empyrean or Paradise, the dwelling of the blessed and the throne of God.

This composite medieval world-picture illustrates what we mean when we say that in the medieval thought-world scriptural revelation and Greek science were accommodated to each other. This is the synthesis mind that I talked about in my last lecture last year. Medieval Christians read the Greek scientific meaning back into revelation, so that the "up" of Jesus' ascension became confused with the "up" of the Ptolemaic world-picture. But science, a human activity, has a history. And when subsequently the Ptolemaic picture was cast aside by men like Bruno and Copernicus, the effect upon the Church and upon the attitude of men towards the Word of God was disastrous. Not because science had disproved the scriptures, but because the medieval church had accommodated the supra-temporal Word of God to a time-condi-

tioned scientific piece of work, understanding the former in the light of the latter, thus reversing the natural order. The science in the synthesis was indeed primitive. But there is no reason, if one does not fall into the original error, for transferring this label to the divine revelation. As religious revelation it comes first, and if it had been heartily believed medieval men might have come to see that the Ptolemaic “world”-picture is not the *world* of scripture. (“World” is one abstracted aspect of world; world can only be understood as the covenantal fellowship of God and man in Christ-Adam.) But they did not see that, and the modern falling away from the Word of God and from the Church can, in a very significant degree, be ascribed to their “accommodating” error.

Let me with an apt quotation from Anatole France’s book *Garden of Epicurus* attempt to convey to you something of the radical change of mind that took place as a result, in which you can feel something of the struggle of heart, the pain, a tinge of the bitterness but also the spirit of adventure of a man forsaken of God and deprived of his heavenly Father’s provision and comfort and believing him-

self to be on his lonely own, all features so highly characteristic of early modern man.

In those days God had no other children than man, and all his creation was ordered in a fashion at once childlike and poetic like an immense cathedral. [But now] we are done with the spheres and the planets under which one was born lucky or unlucky, jovial or saturnine. The solid vault of the firmament is shattered. Our eye and our thought plunge into infinite abysses of heaven. Beyond the planets we discover no longer the Empyrean of the elect and of the angels, but a hundred millions of rolling suns escorted by their cortege of obscure satellites invisible to us. In the midst of this infinity of world our own Sun is but a bubble of gas and our Earth but a fleck of mud.

You get the feel of a youth cast out of his parental home who, with one eye longingly fixed on the past, sets to walking bitterly towards his future, accompanying himself in his loneliness by whistling a dare-devil tune. As one man has put it somewhat sacrilegiously of Giordano Bruno, "There came the day in Bruno's life when he stepped out of his Father's House to make his way *'ins Freie hinaus'* (into



the wide open out of doors).”

### **We Should Learn Our Lesson**

This very important incident at the beginning of the modern age ought to teach us what grave perils are hidden in any attempt at turning the revelation of God into any specific scientific statements, – what in German we might call “*Umdeutung*.”

I suppose that all this was in the mind of that Harvard professor that day. But, as I have already told you, there was no opportunity on that occasion to explain to him how I thought about the matter. Actually, however, his observation had no more bearing on my thought than that other half-rhetorical question once put to me by one of Harvard’s most distinguished professors: “How can you believe in God in these days when space has become so vast; where do you put Him?” For all that the scriptures say about the ascension is that Jesus led the disciples to a place over against Bethany and that while they looked on He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. It ought to be clear that the “up” here simply refers to the very ordinary, everyday experience of those

disciples who remained standing on the earth, the place appointed by God to be man's home.

As we progress in our treatment of our theme, I hope that there will gradually arrive in you an insight into the fatal original error of scientism. That error, to put it briefly, was to take such a word as "up" and insist that the only "true" meaning it could have was the scientific meaning that refers abstractly to relations of physical motion. In logical terms, such words were thought of as being "univocal," i.e. as having one and only one meaning. That is why men like Rudolf Bultmann, when they read in the scriptures the words "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" think at once of a primitive Babylonian world-picture.

### **Rise of Modern Scientism: the World(!) of Matter**

To carry this analysis a step closer to what I hope will be clarity let me say something of how the error of scientism arose in modern times. The modern world of thought began with a new physics and out of that physics there developed the new or mod-

ern philosophy. The philosophers of the new age considered their central task to be the achievement of a new synthesis of thought, this time in terms of the kind of reality that scientific method disclosed. We must not forget that by and large these men, though often maintaining a proper external connection with the Church, were really in their hearts men who had left behind them any genuine belief in divine revelation. They now had to fill in that empty place in their lives with something else. Their ideal was still a system of revelation, though they had abandoned the only revelation there is. They found knowledge, even valid knowledge, but only later did it dawn on them that the knowledge they could find in this way is a different sort of knowledge from what they thought they were finding. At first they agreed that reality was what this new science of physics told us about; for they assumed that the new physics revealed the Truth (not a truth, but the complete, final and only real Truth) about the world, about reality. And what was the reality that this physics disclosed? It was something called "matter." Matter was the name given to what the physicists held that they were measuring.

And so, the view arose that the “world of matter” which the physicists studied, was the real world, the true, full and final sense of the word “world.” Over against this was that other world of ordinary experience, – the world of concrete persons and things, events and institutions we daily come in contact with. This latter world now came to be regarded as the world of appearance, as opposed to the scientists’ world of reality. The world of appearance was thus the “pre-scientific” way of viewing the world; since “logical” came to stand for the methods of the scientists, the pre-scientific world was also the “pre-logical” world, the world as the “pre-logical” mind viewed it, a primitive, undeveloped and therefore unworthy and false representation of things. You can read this very kind of argument in the first pages of Bertrand Russell’s book, *The Problems of Philosophy*.

### **Scientific Attitude of Enlightenment “Historians”**

The very same pattern of thought can be found among the historians of the Age of Enlightenment, who thought of their own generation as the first

to apply the scientific test to everything, and who therefore thought of all previous history as “pre-scientific” history and for that reason not worthy of the scientific historian. They generally looked upon the past as a history of human vanities or errors. R. G. Collingwood, in his book *The Idea of History*, commenting on the fact that the interest of these historians of the early eighteenth century was restricted essentially to the modern period, has this to say:

The real cause of this restriction of interest to the modern period was that with their narrow conception of reason they had no sympathy for, and therefore no insight into, what from their point of view were non-rational periods of human history; they only began to be interested in history at the point where it began to be the history of a modern spirit akin to their own, a scientific spirit...<sup>14</sup>

Again Collingwood writes:

The central point of history, for these writers, is the sunrise of the modern scientific spirit. Before that,

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14. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 78.

everything was superstition and darkness, error and imposture. And of these things there can be no history, not only because they are unworthy of historical study, but because there is in them no rational or necessary development: the story of them is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.<sup>15</sup>

### **Evil Fruit of Scientism**

You can see that the scientific frame of mind leads to a misjudging, actually to a *disqualifying* of everyday experience. This was to have serious consequences for human life and society. It led, particularly in Germany, *the land of Wissenschaft par excellence*, but also in the West generally, to the phenomenon we know as the withdrawal of the scholars from the concerns of everyday life. These pursuers of “truth for truth’s sake” interested themselves in the phenomena of life only after these phenomena had been worked into the straitjacket of a theoretical construction. They lived out their lives in their studies and laboratories. In his book *The University and the Modern World*, Arnold Nash

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15. Ibid., p. 80.

tells us that in Germany this attitude goes back to Goethe at least, who, speaking of the indifference of his circle to the French Revolution, said, “We took no notice of news or newspapers; our object was to know Man; as for men we left them to do as they chose.”<sup>16</sup> Goethe was also the man who said, “Let us leave politics to diplomats and soldiers.”<sup>17</sup> On the very day that Hitler became the German Chancellor, the wife of one of the great German professors of the day spoke of him as “The man in the cheap newspapers.”<sup>18</sup>

But Hitler himself understood the situation; for he wrote in *Mein Kampf* as follows:

God knows the Germans have never been lacking in ‘knowledge.’ Germany’s trouble has been, not that the brains governing her were too little educated but too fully. The heads of the rulers were stuffed with information and empty of instinct, utterly bereft of

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16. Arnold Nash, *The University and the Modern World* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944), p. 34.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

energy and audacity... Why? Because the so-called intellectual class shut itself away from the rest of the workaday world. They had no living ties with the classes below them.<sup>19</sup>

### **The “Absent-Minded” Professor**

The fact was that these German intellectuals of the pre-Hitler regime who had refused to soil their hands by engaging in politics could not recognize – still less comprehend – their fate when it stared them in the face, and they were helpless before it. I had personal experience of this fact which I shall never forget. During my time at Harvard I studied with a German scholar of world-renown. One day he told me about his last days in Berlin. He and his colleagues had been men of *Wissenschaft* in the German tradition. They came to their offices early in the morning and left late in the evening. They carried their scientific work with them in the streets and to their homes, and often wrestled with their problems in the middle of the night. But there came a sudden and rude awakening.

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19. Cited in Nash, pp. 34-35.



Early one morning, this professor told me, a colleague of his had knocked on his office door. After a whispered word they both had gone down into the street and walked along the river Spree. There the colleague had pointed to a human torso that was floating in the river. Utterly shaken, these two men had proceeded to connect this ghastly experience with rumors that had recently begun to pass around among the professors. It was the first breakthrough into the minds of these men of the meaning of the mortal storm that was shaking Hitler's Third Reich. When my professor told me the story it was already more than five years later, but I could still read something of incredulity in his face. This whole generation of scholars had had to be shocked into the awareness that life is more than science, and that this "more" is so very real that it will even determine the nature of the scientific work that is to be performed. Now there was nothing left for this professor (and many others like him) to do but to flee for his personal safety, to run away from the people and society which by its daily toil had made his scholarly work possible, and to leave them to their ghoulish and fiery fates.

Although there has been since World War II something of a change for the better in some quarters, the scientific withdrawal into the world of "scientific truth," the pursuit of "truth for its own sake," continues unabated. There is a good reason for that. The "scientific mind" is not a man. With the decline of the Christian religion and the dominance of scientism for centuries, many men have to all intents and purposes reduced their lives to that thing we call the "scientific mind." Because of the nature of scientific thinking the attitudes and results connected with it cannot be applied easily and directly to life. Therefore, such a "reduced" modern man often cannot get to feel at home in the everyday world of men and events. The easiest way is to retreat into the study or laboratory, and that is what frequently happens. Therefore, the scientific mind is still to be found everywhere in the world. There is no hope for a change except the Truth of the Word of God make men again to be full men, men of God, perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work; except the fulness of life promised by Christ come to our contemporaries. Science cannot do that. Nor can a limited conception of the

validity of science do it.

### **Varieties of the Scientistic Mind**

I think it will be useful, before we proceed to the final analysis of the error of scientism, to offer you a small number of examples of the scientistic mind and its error, so destructive of life, outside the realm of physics. For while the substitution of scientific abstraction for fullness of life began in the modern world with physics, the phenomenon is not restricted to any particular area of the scientific enterprise. Let me give one example each from the fields of law, logic, and theology. I have chosen them from life close by, so that they will be readily grasped.

#### **Scientism in Law**

First, an example from the field of law. Perhaps some of you here also read about the following in a recent issue of a Dutch magazine. There had been a head-on collision between a heavy tractor trailer and an automobile. The result: two places of business along the highway suddenly in complete ruins. This unfortunate event took place on the 28th of April, 1956. When the article appeared in the issue of June 4, 1960 there had not been any disposition

of the case and none of the innocent third parties, who were now actually in need, had been paid a cent.

What was the reason for the delay? A “nice” question, as a lawyer might say, using the word “nice” in its nice or precise sense. It was not clear whether the chauffeur of the automobile had died of a heart attack before the collision, thus causing it, or afterwards as a result of it. Four years later, when some outside persons began to take an interest in the case and approached the lawyers to find out whether something could not be done to help, the lawyers, supposedly representing their clients, who were the real dupes of the affair, brought their hands together fingertip to fingertip and smiled blandly, but only said, “In law this is perfectly normal; Dutch law permits this sort of thing.” Here is what I would call the scientific mind in practice. The legal configurations (abstractions) in this story of human misery had such a complete hold on them that life itself was excluded from the chambers of their hearts (or do such people only have heads)? The *Spiegel* reporter, thus giving unwelcome publicity to the case, concluded his article with the

remark, “Perhaps the lawyers will be brought to see it as more than just an interesting legal case. More important interests are involved here.” There is, of course, nothing wrong with one’s spending one’s life in the study of legal states of affairs, provided one is first of all a man, who understands the abstract nature of scientific figures, and the status of science as servant of life. But the scientific thinker does not have that understanding.

### **Scientism in Logic**

My second example is from the area of logic. There are those who tend to treat the Word of God as though it is nothing but a series of (logical) propositions or of lingual statements. We must at once agree that in the Scriptures as they present themselves to us in our temporal existence, we can find a series of logical propositions. But the question is whether the Scriptures *are* the sum of those propositions, whether they can be grasped in their concrete reality in the logical way. Quite apart from the fact that the Scriptures involve other than logical characteristics, e.g. aesthetic (so that to see them as merely logical propositions is to enlarge an aspect

of them to be their whole), can we possibly account for what the Word of God claims for itself on this logicistic (= scientific view of logic) reading? E.g. that it is a power to convert the soul? Do logical judgments, or any series of them, do that?

The logicistic thinker may offer as a rejoinder that he is thinking of the *truth* in logical proposition, and that a proper understanding of his meaning obviates the difficulty since the power is in the truth. But the next question is, What is that truth in the propositions? Is it the propositions?

The contemporary philosopher Martin Heidegger has vividly brought to our attention that “truth” manifests itself in other ways than propositions. The truth of a work of art, for example, does not consist in a proposition or in any group of propositions. Barrett, in discussing the matter in his book *Irrational Man* writes: “The momentous assertion that Heidegger makes is that truth does not reside primarily in the intellect, but that, on the contrary, intellectual truth is in fact a derivative of a more basic – I would add: and integral – ‘sense

of truth.”<sup>20</sup>

Barrett presents us with a very clear illustration of Heidegger’s meaning. Someone tells me a new “theory” of his. It happens that as soon as I hear it, I know it to be false. “Challenged to give arguments against it, I may stumble inarticulately; in some cases, indeed, I find it not worth-while to give a rebuttal, for the ideas ring false the moment they strike my ear. Some dumb inarticulated understanding, some sense of truth planted, as it were, in the marrow of my bones, makes me know that what I am hearing is not true. Whence comes this understanding? It is the understanding that I have by virtue of being rooted in existence. It is the kind of understanding we all have when confronted with ideas that we know to be false even though it may take us a long time to articulate reasons for rejecting them. If we did not have this understanding, we could never utter any propositions as true or false.”<sup>21</sup>

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20. William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, p. 192.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

The logicistic thinker has lost his hold upon this primordial form of understanding. For him, the central personal experiencing of truth has come to be reduced to one (logical) mode of this experiencing. But to identify the figures of a certain scientific mode of experiencing with the full concrete experience of life is precisely scientism.

In such logicism an internal problem still lurks. For logical figures contain in themselves a number of analogical moments. Within the “world” of logic we speak of such “things” as logical space – what the Germans call *Denkraum*, logical movement of thought (logical causality), logical thought-*life*, logical control (we say of someone that he has logical control of his material), logical commerce, logical economy of thought, logical harmony, logical *eros* (Platonic love), and so on. The presence of these analogical moments in our logical life would seem to indicate that “the logical” does not stand by itself, and therefore cannot be equated with full concrete reality.

### **A Further Discussion of Logicism**

But I wish to press my argument a step further in



order to show as clearly as I can here the difficulties one runs into when attempting to explain the world of reality from the logical point of view. In logic since the time of Hume, and particularly of Kant, a great deal of attention has been given to what is called the logical difference between Is and Ought, between *Sein* and *Sollen*. We distinguish a proposition of the “is” form (i.e. one of which the predicate is expressed by the words “is” or “will be” or their equivalent) from one of the “ought” form (of which the predicate is expressed by the words “ought” or “should be” or an equivalent). Recently I participated in a discussion with a Christian friend of mine who is much absorbed in logical questions. This question of the logical difference between “is” and “ought” came up, and my friend came up with a sentence to illustrate each. For the “ought” statement he offered: “Thou shalt not kill”; for the “is” statement: “God is the creator of the world, including me.” Now I am not concerned to bring up all the details of our argument this morning. I want to make just one point. I granted my friend that there was a difference between the *logical forms* of the two statements, but I argued that merely this difference

in logical form could not express a *deeper sense* in which his second statement – viz. God is the creator of the world, including me – could not be considered a statement of “is” as opposed to a statement of “ought.” I reminded him of what Calvin says about our knowledge of God in the second chapter of the first book of his *Institutes*: “Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety,”<sup>22</sup> to which we must add the following from the second section of the same chapter: “Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverences, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.”<sup>23</sup>

What was I trying to do by thus citing Calvin? I was trying to suggest to my friend that we must ask ourselves how we have come by the knowledge contained in the statement: “God is the creator of the world, including me,” and, that if we do not ask ourselves that question we shall find ourselves

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22. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 39.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 43.

involved in an impasse. For we can know this statement only by religion, and religion means “sensing” – not the modal psychical sensing, but the concrete religious awareness of the full man – my obligation of obedience to my sovereign God in terms of His Law. My knowledge that God is the creator of the world, including me, is not just a logical proposition or a lingual statement; it is personal knowledge, heart-knowledge: it is immediately gained by the total person whose heart is in the grip of the Word of God. My logicistic friend was not really dealing with “is” and “ought,” but only with these *in the way they are expressed in propositions*. When he limits his understanding of such matters to the peculiarly logical mode of experiencing them, he is seeing life merely in terms of its logico-lingual aspects, and thus of necessity making the relative abstract figures of logical structure to be the equivalent of life in its fullness. This is another instance of scientism, and is doomed to failure. Even for the person engaging in it the consequences are bad: if in the scientific attitude we heartily embrace a particular aspect of life and attempt to understand the latter from out of the former, we shall find that we

can no longer understand the Word of God.

This is, in my opinion, what was involved in the so-called Clark case in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church more than fifteen years ago.

### **Scientism in Theology**

My third and final example of the scientific attitude that we find all about us is taken from the world of theology. It is a very simple but telling example. Recently there has been some discussion in Christian Reformed circles about the proper grounds for erecting Christian schools. The traditional ground, it has been suggested by some, is the doctrine of the covenant. Again, I am not interested this morning in deciding whether this is the proper ground for our Christian schools. As a matter of fact, I doubt whether we can approach the problem even in this way, speaking of “*a* doctrine” as the ground. I suspect that a particular form of scientism is already present here, viz. theo-logicism or theologism – truth as so many disparate true theological propositions – and I would suggest that our schools are based on the Truth of the divine word-revelation, which is one. But that is merely an “aside.”

What I want to discuss more particularly right now is the culpable way in which one of the ministers of the Christian Reformed Church goes about rejecting the so-called “doctrine” of the covenant as the suggested ground for the erection of our schools and the equally culpable way in which one of our educators goes about defending it. I am referring to the debate between the Rev. Hugh Koops and Mr. Raymond Geerdes as recorded in a recent exchange.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the quickest way to get into this debate is to quote a number of passages. Mr. Koops suggests that Mr. Geerdes is unhelpful because he “has looked for a foundation for a separate school system in the wrong area. He has turned to Christian theology and come up with the doctrine of the covenant.” He then asks, “Is Christian education so bankrupt that it must turn to *another discipline* (italics mine) to find a foundation for our schools?” Further on he says that it grieves him that “an educator like Mr. Geerdes can find no educational ground for our school system, and must take recourse to what must be shaky ground for him.” (He means theology, as a “discipline,” Mr. Geerdes presumably

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24. *Torch and Trumpet*, March 1959.

has not studied, and in which he would therefore probably not be at home.) He finally admonishes: "Let (Christian educators) define Christian education in educational rather than in theological principles... for the covenant belongs in the church, not in the school; in theology, not education; in the recreative, not the creative sphere." (At the mention of this last pair of concepts I am strongly tempted to cry out, "Oh, my poor aching head!" But I shall try to keep calm a while longer. For surely Mr. Koops' adversary will set things right?)

No; his adversary does not set things right. He writes: "Our theological heritage is a rich mine *with education implications.*" (The familiar scholastic idea of theological *Lehrsätze* [propositions] for the educational theory of the Christian, instead of an integral scripturally directed paedagogics.) He refers to what his opponent had said about theology's being shaky ground for an educator, calls it presumptuous of Mr. Koops, and, somewhat grandiloquently continues: "The ground that to the Rev. Koops is shaking earth is to me the *terra firma* of God's truth." Now, that sounds a little better; for Mr. Geerdes finally gets around to speaking of God's truth. But

later he goes on to speak of theology. Now, which does he mean? For he must choose. Surely, the *terra firma* of God's truth ought not to be called theology, or we might get an unfortunate canonization, no, worse, declaration of infallibility of Berkhof or some other theologian (depending of course, on my hearers' preferences). Let us not be the cause of any theologian's becoming a stuffed shirt. As a science, theology is like any other area of the scientific enterprise. Geerdes finishes by saying,

The issue is now before us. Is our distinctive Reformed theology the fountainhead of our Christian schools? Or is some solely "educational" discipline the justification for our schools? The future of our schools in the second half of the Twentieth Century depends upon how we answer this question.

### **Religious Knowledge Not Theology**

You are correct, Mr. Geerdes. Except that we must never answer it by accepting your disjunction. Our choice is fortunately not between theology and education. How can you put theology over against education if you mean by theology the Word of God? Indeed, the Word of God which makes us aware

of the reality of the covenant and of much more is the renewing Word which makes both our theology and our education new. But both you men have confused the issue by identifying our knowledge of God with theology. If they were identical, how could our theology continue to be reformed, i.e. continue to reform itself? By what standard or Norm?

What we have here is an especially insidious form of scientism which makes the knowledge of the realities of God and creation and man equivalent to a theological statement about them. This confusion is to be found all about us. But the Reformation taught us that we are free from the theologians in understanding and interpreting the Word of God. Life precedes science, and in life God makes us aware of (reveals to us) the Truth. The theological expression, the educational expression, *all* scientific expression follows, and is informed by the deeper pre-scientific knowledge of the Truth that man does not have as a scientist but as man of God. It would seem that our Reformed circles are often far from the Reformation. The best thing you can read on this is the group of three chapters



entitled “Philosophy and Theology” in the book *In the Twilight of Western Thought* by Herman Dooyeweerd.<sup>25</sup>

Prof. T.F. Torrance of Edinburgh made himself guilty of the same theologistic error when he spoke to a gathering of faculty members at Calvin College a little over a year ago. In answering a question I had put to him, he said that the empirical sciences by their very nature cannot tell about wholeness, but theology does just that: it tells us about wholeness. He did not explain how that could then be a science. The difference, he said, was the problem, for example, of the psychiatrist and the minister. The psychiatrist has some truth, he declared, but to know a person we need the wholeness of theology.

### **This Difference Known to Kuyper**

The distinction between a knowledge of Truth and theological knowledge was known also to Abraham Kuyper, who once wrote, “Just name the one name of Jesus Christ and you feel at once how the entire scientific enterprise must abandon its demand to take first place in our estimation of our life.”

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25. Read especially pp. 135-136, 144-145.

Kuyper saw that a distinction had to be made between “the knowledge of God, which every one of the Lord’s children possesses and which is eternal life,” and “scientific theology, which is practiced in our faculties of theology.”<sup>26</sup>

With that I bring to an end my illustrations of the scientific attitude of mind. Of course, these examples could be multiplied many times over. Wherever political scientists or linguists attempt to set the bounds of life-phenomena or to call life-forms into being (Esperanto), wherever people leave it to the theologians to figure out what we should believe, wherever the psychologist or the student of ethics claims that his science treats the whole of human behavior, wherever Marxism prevails – in all these places we have to do with the banal distortions of life caused by the attitudes of scientism.

### **Recognition of “Pre-Scientific” Had to Come**

Not only because of the awakening of the German professors but for many other reasons a change had to come. E.g., while at Harvard I had a friend who was a physicist. He had the scientific bug, and we

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26. *De Heraut*, No. 939; 22 December 1895.

argued many times about it. Once on a picnic we were surprised by a sudden evening shower. My friend turned to his wife and said, "Let's get into the car and get home; after this the sun will soon be going down." In complete astonishment I, who had been standing idly by, came to full attention and, looking him straight in the eye, said, "Isn't that a disgrace that an intelligent scientist like you should condescend to use such non-scientific language?" I offer this as an illustration of the fact that a scientific scientist of necessity makes use of everyday language which does not have any scientific pretension whatsoever. To speak of the sun's going down is not *unscientific*; it is not a failure to be up to the scientific standard, not a primitive scientific statement. For it has nothing whatsoever to do with the scientific frame of mind. The pre-scientific is not *unscientific* but *non-scientific*; it is of another kind than scientific. A statement about the sunset does not refer to the earth and the sun in their mutual relations as a result of their physical motion in space; it is language which gives expression to our experience of life from out of our central (religious) human position as lords of the creation (Ps. 8). All

the arguments about no longer being able to believe that man is the center of the created world and the earth the scene of the great drama of the covenantal fellowship between God and men stem from making the physical *aspect* of life the whole of life. But the physical aspect is not the whole, nor is the jural, nor is the logical, nor the biotic, nor any other aspect. Life in its totality, in its robust concrete meaning, is religion. But I shall not develop this theme until later.

### **Contemporary Evidences of a Changed Attitude**

There had to come a change; there had to come a greater appreciation of everyday life. And there has. I do not say that there has come a proper understanding of pre-scientific life. But in the twentieth century there is everywhere noticeable a renewed interest in the pre-scientific, and a greater appreciation of the fundamental importance of understanding it if we are to plumb the mystery of our life. One of the traces of truth in all our present-day "rationalisms" is that life is more basic than science, that science is the servant of life. But the general turn about that I am referring to is by no means

limited to *irrationalistic* philosophies. Let me suggest a few of the significant changes I have in mind.

### **Gestalt Psychology**

I suppose in one sense we might begin with Von Ehrenfels' famous article of 1890, "*Ueber Gestaltqualitäten*" (which goes back to Ernst Mach), with Wertheimer, Koffka, Köhler, and the beginnings of the *Gestalt* school of psychology; for this school broke in some sense with the idea that everyday experience must be broken down into elements and then theoretically reconstructed, and drew attention to direct experience of persons and things. But that was only a beginning.

### **Levy-Bruhl Abandons "Pre-Logical"**

I have in mind, rather, to speak first of the famous French anthropologist of the Sorbonne who died just at the outbreak of the Second World War, Lucien Levy-Bruhl. (If ever there was a positivist, i.e. a thoroughly scientific thinker, Levy-Bruhl was it.) You have all heard, I am sure, of the positivistic dictum of the three states in the evolution of the human understanding: the theological, metaphysical and positive scientific stages. Basing himself on

this doctrine, Levy-Bruhl produced a famous study of the primitive peoples. But in 1938, Levy-Bruhl abandoned his distinction between “pre-logical” and “logical” (his recantation was published only posthumously in 1947, and is discussed by William F. Albright in the 1951 French translation of his book, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*) precisely because, as Albright states it, “he found so much evidence of quite logical thinking in the ordinary affairs of life, even in the most primitive tribes of today.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Phenomenological and Existentialist “Psychology”**

The next thing I shall mention is the great development, since Brentano’s doctrine of intentionality influenced Edmund Husserl, of phenomenological and existentialist psychology. Here too a much greater emphasis is being placed on concrete events and men in contact with things and persons.<sup>28</sup>

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27. William Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), p. 8.

28. Here I refer the student to Jan van den Berg, *Kro-*

### Interest in Pre-scientific Language

The last thing I wish to mention is the increased interest in ordinary language that characterizes G. E. Moore, the later Wittgenstein, and certain currents in the school of language analysis. To which I would add a reference to a very important, recent article by Prof. John Wild of Harvard in the *Philosophical Review*, entitled “Is There a World of Ordinary Language?”<sup>29</sup> In that article, Wild says that a “concern to achieve an accurate description of the concrete phenomena of the *Lebenswelt*, as they are experienced and expressed in ordinary language, is a constant theme of all [Husserl’s] writings,” and adds that “in this broad sense the influence of phenomenology has spread far and wide.” He writes that “most European philosophers would agree that the task of describing the phenomena of this life-world and of analyzing its structure is of primary

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*niek der Psychologie* (The Hague: Boekencentrum NV, 1953).

29. John Wild, “Is There a World of Ordinary Language?” *Philosophical Review* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University), pp. 460-476.

importance for philosophy.”<sup>30</sup> Wild was struck with the movement towards the concrete in both continental phenomenology and Anglo-Saxon language analysis, and he asks whether both movements are not “approaching the same thing (concrete experience) from different angles?”<sup>31</sup>

### **Some Dutch Voices**

In the Netherlands Cornelis A. van Peursen once wrote that abstraction and formalization are very great potentials granted to men. Still, both always relate to actual, concrete life, to the flesh-and-blood person doing the abstracting and formalizing. As well, Okke Jager wrote: “We are still too firmly attached to the lie that the scientific way of thinking as such is more lucid and exact than the nonscientific way of thinking of someone who prays.”<sup>32</sup>

That is enough, I think, to indicate something of the momentous re-orientation that has been

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30. Ibid., p. 460.

31. Ibid., p. 462.

32. Okke Jager, *What Does God Want, Anyway?*, translation of *Uw Wil Geschiede*, trans. M. E. Osterhaven (Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1972), p. 16.



and is still going on in the intellectual world of the twentieth century.

### **Recapitulation: Basic Problem of Scientism**

It is time to draw together the sense of our discussion thus far and to take a somewhat closer, though necessarily brief and only suggestive, look at the fundamental problem involved in it. The problem which the long dominance of the scientific frame of mind forces upon us is that of the relation that exists between what is properly called “scientific” and what we may speak of as the “pre-scientific.”

Scientism recognizes only the scientific. It regards what we call “pre-scientific” as *unscientific*, as something that falls short of meeting scientific specifications. It fails to observe that the “pre-scientific” is not really *unscientific*, but rather *non-scientific*, i.e. *of a wholly other kind than scientific*, and therefore to be judged by other standards than those for science. It overlooks the important fact that this *nonscientific* experience (and knowledge) is also actually pre-scientific since it is always experience previous to the scientific, is indeed a necessary condition for the acquisition of it. In the Christian

world a particularly striking example of the insidious working of the scientific frame of mind is the confusion of the immediate awareness of the integral Truth of the Word of God in our hearts (God, of course, opening our hearts to believe His Word, cf. Acts 16:14) with a scientific (theological) body of propositional statements about this Truth. So much attention has been devoted to the latter that the necessary earlier possession of the former has largely been overlooked, to the great detriment, not least, of a proper understanding of theology qua science, of theological method in general, and in particular of the process of exegesis.

By its very nature then the scientific mind has everywhere been compelled to ignore the important role that this everyday (non-and pre-scientific) experience plays in our lives. Thus, scientism fails to note something of the structure of the creation, and as a result is compelled to render a distorted account both of our experience and of the cosmos. The consequences, as we have seen, have been legion and grave.

### **Scientism's Unresolved Problems**

When, scientifically, one allows only scientific knowledge, one is forced to seek the sense of meaning of life in such knowledge. At once, however, the scientific thinker is confronted with a difficulty. For there are many sciences, and their subject-matters and methods are different. The scientific mind being not limited to any one area of scientific knowledge, many scientific viewpoints vie with one another for the powerful position of central religious revelation of the Truth.

Because time after time men have thus attempted to oversee all of reality from one or another of these diverse scientific viewpoints, many -isms have arisen in the course of human speculation: materialism, naturalism, biologism or vitalism, psychologism, logicism, historicism (German, *Historismus* – what Dr. Reid is talking to us about in this Conference), economism (Marx), aestheticism, moralism, etc. The very diversity of scientific points of view should warn us that we do not have to do in the several forms of scientific knowledge with life in its radical unity, but only with various ‘aspects’ or ‘sides’ of life.

Still more, the occurrence in all of the sciences of elementary or basic concepts of an analogical kind (a phenomenon which cannot be explained as metaphorical use of language) should caution us against assuming that any one scientific area exists by itself as empirical reality. For these analogical concepts in the various sciences, like the analogical moments of the several modal aspects that constitute our experience and which guarantee the specific modal sense of the analogical concepts, *are the expression of an indissoluble coherence of meaning in an irreducible diversity of meaning.* They presuppose a deeper unity of meaning. If we do not experience this unity in some one or other of the bodies of scientific knowledge, where then?

(There is no time now to go further into this particular matter of analogy and analogical concepts in science, though it is fundamental. I merely suggest it here for the fullness of the account. Any of you who might be interested in pursuing the subject may consult, besides Dooyeweerd's *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, his *Roots of Western Culture*.)

The diversity of scientific points of view already suggests it, and the occurrence of analogical concepts in each science strongly indicates it, but a consideration of how we come by our scientific knowledge makes abundantly clear that there is, previous to our scientific experience, a more integral experience of reality, i.e. an experience of reality in its wholeness of meaning. For scientific knowledge can only be acquired by a process of abstraction from life as thus experienced in its wholeness.

### **Error of Scientism Illustrated**

A simple illustration will make the point unmistakably clear. A young surgeon early in the morning comes down to the hospital where he is to perform an operation. As he is about to enter the front door of the hospital he finds himself suddenly face to face with the man who had been his favorite professor in the medical school, a man who, though now retired, likes to linger about the hospital. For one second their eyes meet, they shake hands and exchange a few words and pass. A few hours later we discover our young surgeon in a nearby dining room waiting for a couple of his colleagues to ar-

rive. He is sitting at the table lost in thought. He is, in fact, thinking of his brief early morning encounter with old "Doc" Maguire. The old man, so our young surgeon is thinking to himself, still cuts quite a figure. In spite of his years he still walks sturdily, appears firm, has eyes like flint; he remains still a "warm" personality, with eyes that literally draw you to him. Our surgeon smiles faintly to himself as he recalls his renewed experience of the incisiveness of the old man's eyes, something which in the old days had provoked frequent student comment. And again, this morning, our surgeon muses, he had had repeated his sense of something unusually harmonious and pleasing about the professor's presence; and then, of course, also his gregariousness.

You will have noticed that in the dining room it takes our surgeon a long time to "recount" what he experienced in but a moment of time early in the morning at the front door of the hospital. Further, at the table the surgeon is able to distinguish a number of "sides" or "aspects" to his "experience" of old "Doc" Maguire. At the moment of their meeting he was not strictly aware of any such diversity of aspects; he had simply experienced the "Doc."

*Yet if he had not experienced them in the morning he would not have been able to recall them as experienced at noon.* But there they were. The eyes like flint (organic). The warm personality and drawing eyes (psychical). The piercing or incisive look (logical). The gregariousness (social). The pleasing harmony (aesthetic). In the morning these aspects had been experienced only *implicitly*; at noon, *explicitly*.

These several aspects become the fields of investigation of the special sciences. The science of the organic, for example, disentangles (abstracts) from its interwovenness in the whole concrete experience that which is peculiarly organic, that which is subject to organic laws. Psychology does the same thing (or should) with “the psychical”; logic or analytics, with “the analytical”; aesthetics, with “the aesthetic.”

In daily life, however, we experience persons like “Doc” Maguire, things, events and institutions concretely, i.e. in the wholeness of their meaning. The tree on the hill, under which the young man chooses to picnic with his beloved, is for that youth “good” not only in the biotic sense, but also psychically, socially, aesthetically, etc. But our youth is

not aware of all these distinctions. (As soon as he is, he abandons, for a moment, the everyday attitude.) Rather, he grasps the “sense” of the situation integrally. This kind of experience is presupposed in the later scientific abstraction; it is thus not only non-scientific but also pre-scientific. This common or everyday experience we call naive experience (from Latin, *nativum*, meaning “original”).

### **Another Illustration**

A second illustration may serve to bring into still sharper focus the relation of scientific knowledge to naive experience. Imagine a modern coffee shop so enclosed within a glass wall that we who are without can see and hear what is going on inside without being detected. Inside, life is going on as is usual in such a coffee shop. But let us suppose that we have lined up around the outside of the glass wall a group of scientists intent on observing the life within. Let us say that among them are a physicist, a biologist, a logician, a linguist, a student of social life, an economist, and a student of aesthetics. All these scientists observe the same life-situations: some people inside are standing at



the counter ordering; others are sitting at tables alone or in groups, the latter engaged in quiet or animated conversation. But out of this whole situation, which each scientist experiences, the physicist, for example, abstracts only those “figures” that tell something about mass, motion, force, etc., such as the work involved in lifting a cup of coffee from the tabletop to the mouth against the pull of gravity. Other than figures of this kind he utterly ignores as a physicist. At the same time that our physicist is doing this, the biologist watches for such things as the return of “life” to the exhausted body, digestion, etc. He ignores the physical and other “figures” the other scientists are raptly observing. The logician listens for logical “figures” of implication in the often enthymemic reasoning of everyday life. The linguist abstracts those “moments” that have something to tell him about human symbolical communication. The student of social life is watching for social mores; he may be studying the very same gestures the linguist is watching, but rather from the standpoint of ways of persons’ getting along with one another than from the standpoint of symbolical communication. The economist notices

how large a cup of coffee you can buy for the price paid, and for signs of the “market’s” willingness or unwillingness to pay. (Note that when we speak of the people on the floor of the stock exchange – or, for that matter, the people assembled at an old European village market – as “market” we are using a term which describes that human situation there (Human Society) not in its wholeness of meaning, but only from the economic point of view: a lover might have arranged a rendezvous with his beloved in the center of the flower market, but this is not “market.”) Finally, the student of aesthetics will be observing in the life that is playing itself off inside the coffee shop, what is pleasing and harmonious in the gestures, movements, arrangements, etc. He too is abstracting “figures.”

These illustrations, I think, make sufficiently clear why we must not, scientifically, seek the unity and meaning of life in any body of scientific knowledge. The sciences arise from the fact that there are various ways (Latin: *modus*; English: modes, hence, modalities) of viewing the one reality, and every special science deals with only a “facet” of life.

### **Wholeness of Life Given in Naive Experience**

Life itself we meet only in our naive experience. Here we experience not only persons and things, events and institutions in their wholeness, but also the given interwovenness of all these in their subject-subject and subject-object relations.<sup>33</sup> By way of our naive experience we grasp something of the sense of reality as a whole, sense something of the unity of life.

For this reason, as we have seen, much contemporary thought is now attempting to find the meaning of life in everyday situations. William Barrett, for instance, in his book *Irrational Man* (which you should read), says that existentialism “seeks to bring the whole man – the concrete individual in the whole context of his everyday life, and in his total mystery and questionableness – into philosophy.”<sup>34</sup> The notion is abroad today that life is to be explained in terms of concrete encounters. We read frequently that the encounter between human persons is more important than our scientific

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33. See Above p. 42ff.

34. Barrett, *Irrational Man*, p. 244.

knowledge of things. Love, it is often maintained, will show us the meaning of life.

### **Yet, Sense of Life Elusive**

Praiseworthy as is the turn to naive experience, the attempt now to find it in the unity and meaning of our existence is doomed to failure just as certainly as was the earlier scientific adventure. As long as men seek this unity and meaning within our functional life, it will elude them, for the simple reason that throughout all the reaches of this functional life there constantly reappears a modal diversity of meaning. Love itself, for instance, displays many senses. There is erotic or sexual love, marital love, filial and parental love, love of one's country (patriotism), love for rational distinction (platonic love), the love of beauty, the love of the brethren in the instituted church, and so on. Where in all this diversity is the unified sense of our existence that men seek?

We have previously seen that in the irreducible diversity of meaning that an analysis of our experience everywhere discloses there is an indissoluble coherence of meaning, which presupposes a deeper

unity of meaning, a concentration, as it were, of all the diverse “sides” of meaning. But what this unity might be no examination into our functional life can discover. At this point we reach the limits of an analytical examination of our experience.

### **Scriptural Insight into Life as Religion**

Only when the living and powerful Word of God, about which I talked to you in the lectures last year, takes hold of us in our hearts and unites us to Christ can we know the Truth. Only then are we made to “see,” to see the unity of meaning in the diversity and coherence. Only then are we made aware of our office as men, the office of being servants of God in singleness of heart; only then are we made aware of our central position in the cosmos, a central position where all the “aspects” of our created life are concentrated in the meaning of life as religion.

The Truth, as the divine Word discloses it, is that life is religion. No, I did not say “religious.” To say that need only mean that “religion” is one dimension of created reality among many, as when we say that life is beautiful. When I use the noun and say that life is religion I mean to say that reli-

gion is the concentration-point of all the “sides” or “aspects” of created meaning. To take our example of love, we shall remain floundering in a temporal diversity of meaning until we see in the great (religious) commandment to love the Lord our God with our whole heart the concentration and fulfillment of the diverse modal “aspects” of love. Likewise, all our words receive in religion their unity and fulfillment. Take the word “world.” We may speak of a physical world, of the world of life, the world of sense, the economic world or the world of beauty, but by now we are able to see that in each of these instances the word “world” should be enclosed within quotation marks. For each of these “worlds” is but an aspect of the concrete world, the world in its fullness of meaning. It was simply the prophet in man, a condition of human existence that as such remains – though (immanentistically) misdirected – in the fallen state, which caused men in their spiritual blindness to identify first one and then another of these “worlds” with the world. Reality is neither the physical “world” nor the “world” of beauty, nor any other such “world,” but is that wonderful covenant fellowship which God has es-

established with man, who (now in Christ) occupies the central place in the creation, who is put under the divine Law in the three-fold office of prophet-priest-king to worship and serve God in carrying out the cultural mandate in the world in singleness of heart.

### **Beneficial Fruits of a Scriptural Insight**

The man who has seen life as religion can never again fall back into being a mere “scientific mind” (absent-minded professor). He is on the way to becoming that perfect man of God, thoroughly equipped for every good work, about whom Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:17. That young Christian students see this is a matter of life or death for the Body of Christ in our time. And not only that they see it, but that they whole-heartedly believe it and live in accordance with it. For it is, after all, nothing but the Gospel, and the Gospel is our full salvation in the world, thus also in the “world” of the university. To believe the Gospel is to be saved from unbelief and its fruits: revolution and disintegration.

### **Devastations Wrought by Scientism**

The lamentable fact is that many Christians who

pass through our universities get bitten by the bug of scientism. We must never forget that scientism is itself a belief, a faith. That is, it offers itself, just as all faiths do, as the directing Principle of human life. But scientism is a false faith; its direction has been misdirection. All who suffer its infection lose their way, Christians as well as non-Christians.

Those Christians who might have used a truly Christian university education to discover how to relate simple Christian faith to the cultural situation of our time and thus been enabled to enter into discussion with the Bertrand Russells of the world have themselves become sidetracked. Some of them get caught up in the mathematical-physical way (method) of viewing experience; others, in the biological, or psychological, or whatever. Either they become so completely absorbed in their area of specialization that in their personal lives they retreat from the fullness of life and of manhood to become sad examples of that strange "lost" soul, the abstract scientific mind, or perhaps they attempt to "see" (i.e. oversee) all of life from the special point of view of their field of study and come sooner or later to present much-demanded lectures on how



“the physicist” or “the biologist” or the what-have-you looks at life, or, at the very best, in addition to their studies in the special science of their choice, they find some time also for theological questions and theological *Lehrsätze* (propositions).

Each of these ways of behavior suffers from the sickness of scientism – the third no less than the others – and sidetracks the Christian from carrying out his task in the world. The substitution of theology for a central religious awareness of the Truth is a very effective way of putting the Christian religion down to scientific size. It is just one more way of missing the central religious meaning of life. To add theological disquisitions to biological or psychological or sociological ones does not bring us one whit closer to the root-unity of life or to the Truth.

### **Our Task**

What must be rediscovered in Protestantism if we are to survive in the gigantic cultural struggle of our time is an awareness of the directing role in life of the Word of God, the sense of that Word. To a more positively articulated statement about that we shall come in the next lecture. In the present lec-

ture we have had first to clear the path by discussing that scientism which has so universally sidetracked Christians from the way to wisdom and abundant life.

# 6

## SPHERE- SOVEREIGNTY

### *Lecture 5*

SOME TIME AGO AN ADDRESS was delivered in Washington, D.C. in which a distinguished man had this to say: "In an industrial society men have to work out a great part of their destiny within the framework of business or industry, and these will have to provide much more than just the business services they render." As an illustration of what he meant, the speaker pointed to the medieval guilds.

I refer to the incident here only to make clear that the influence of scientism still pervades our life. How could it ever be proper to speak of an industrial SOCIETY? Is there in society not also the life of married couples, are there not families and

church-institutes, the arts, schools, and, last but scarcely least, the state? And do we not mean the state when we speak of human society? And do we not mean when we speak of human society the human community in its totality of possible relations, or all the ways in which we live our lives in community with our fellowmen? How then could a whole society come to be known as an industrial society?

You reply, "But this concept is merely meant to be a description of a particular society we find before us, in which the economic and technical sides of life have grown to be dominant, just as we might speak of the society of the Middle Ages as an ecclesiasticized society." Let me point out then that the speaker we have cited speaks of an industrial society in which "men have to work out a great part of their destiny within the framework of business or industry" and that he argues that "these will have to provide much more than just the business services they render."

### **Are Facts Normed?**

Must we, as this speaker does, accept the fact of a society that is coming to be dominated by technol-

ogy and industry as the point of departure for our thinking about what must be done in society? Let it be granted that business, technology and industry do take up an unusually large part of our lives in our society. Can this be regarded as anything but a most abnormal situation? Would such a development have taken place if the lives of our marriages and families, of our churches and our states, if our social life and the life of the arts and sciences among us had been sound? But if our society is sick, should we accommodate to it, or, as in the case of bodily sickness, intervene, either by surgical removal or by stimulating other powers latent in the body, in order to combat the disease?

**Is There a “*Pou Sto*” (a “Place to Stand”)?**

Of course, intervention, at least meaningful intervention, supposes an insight into what a healthy order would be. Do we possess anywhere such an insight? If we do not, are we not compelled just to accept the fact of an industrial society, and attempt to solve our problems within the possibilities it provides us? But if we do, what central reality is it from out of which we can properly oversee human

society in all the complexity of its functional life? Is there a point somewhere out beyond, not itself immanently involved in our functional existence, to which we can withdraw and from which we can attain to such an overview, in order that we may return within the order of our society to judge its relative sickness or health and to work to rectify what is not good?

My young friends, this is the problem, in its solution so gravely momentous for all mankind, to which the concept of sphere-sovereignty claims to give a scriptural answer.

Only when we have reached the point to which our first lecture brought us are we at all in a position to understand and judge the significance of the debate about sphere-sovereignty. We had to be rid of the attitude of scientism in order to see life as religion. Scientism cannot allow any order or structure in temporal reality that is not the product of scientific reflection, the only Oracle or Source of truth it recognizes. Yet scientific thought, by its very abstracting nature, is compelled to remain enclosed within someone or other aspect of temporal reality. It thus must lack the *point d'appui* or cen-

tral vantage point from which a view of the whole of life in its order or structure can be had. This is already to be seen from the conflicting diversity of points of view to which scientism has given rise. No science, no scientific point of view, not even that of theology, can give us the central insight we need into the order of society. Such an insight into an ordering principle can only be experienced when, by reason of the hold that the Word of God takes upon them, our hearts have been opened to the religious root-life of the temporal world. Only in religion, which is, after all, our ultimate human situation, only when we stand in Christ, the Truth, do we become aware of the principle of sphere-sovereignty. But when we have seen what it means to say that our life is religion, when we have seen Christ as the new Root and Head of recreated humanity, to whom, as the Ruler of society, all power has been given, then we will also understand sphere-sovereignty. That is how it went with Abraham Kuyper, the man with whose name you undoubtedly connect this concept. In the manner of a new and living faith Kuyper saw the place of Christ within the creation-order of God as the new Office-bearer in

Adam's stead. But then the vast and life-quicken- ing perspectives of sphere-sovereignty at once opened themselves up to him. Sphere-sovereignty became for Kuyper the expression of the Order of Creation as graciously revealed to us anew in the Word of God. So intimately was sphere-sovereignty bound up with his central insight into the Word of God that Kuyper made it the fundamental principle of his Anti-revolutionary political action. And on that "day of days in Kuyper's life" as Mr. Vanden Berg in his recent book, *Abraham Kuyper*,<sup>1</sup> so fittingly describes the momentous opening day of the Free University of Amsterdam, Kuyper spoke in his opening address on sphere-sovereignty.

### **Statement of Thesis**

The central thesis of my lecture this morning is that the concept of sphere-sovereignty gives accurate expression to the scriptural revelation about the structural make-up of created reality and that it thus becomes, as the meaning of the divine word-revelation, our Arche, the Principle or Starting-point

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1. Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978).



which drives, directs and governs all our life-activities in the world.

To discuss sphere-sovereignty is at once as simple and as extraordinarily difficult as any subject could be. In one sense I can frankly tell you that I did not choose this topic for these lectures; it chose me. In the light of the perilous situation of all mankind in our time and of the absence of insight and conviction on the part of Christians I felt that we shall have to come to think more seriously about this subject, not only privately, but especially in a collective way. I know that I shall not be able to rise to the heights that my subject demands; I only wish to stimulate your collective thinking about the matter. It would be impossible in one lecture thoroughly to argue sphere-sovereignty. Right now, I am merely presenting it for your consideration. I trust it will send you to the books and articles. That is what I take to be one of the main purposes of this Conference: to stimulate a further collective study and reflection on certain crucial (central) problems to which we shall in the future have to give a collective answer. We must create among us a community of thought. For just this purpose an Institute

which could give continuous opportunity for such directed communal thinking ought to be set up at the earliest possible date. Time and events press us.

### **Its Contemporary Importance**

It will not be necessary for us to return to Abraham Kuyper and the Netherlands of the last century in order to feel the surpassing importance of our present theme. In our own time and place the question that is perhaps uppermost in the thoughts and conversations of concerned men everywhere is the question about the nature and limits of authority; it is undoubtedly the most urgent question facing our democracies. How is government related to business, industry and technology? What is the relation of a trade union to a political party (a particularly pressing question at the moment here in Canada, but scarcely less so in the United States)? What relation should exist between the church and education, between the government and education (e.g. when a government, as in the U.S.A. recently, suddenly faces the need, for the preservation of its national existence, to have the schools in the nation catch up with the standards of their Russian coun-

terparts), between religion and education? What but fear of conflict or authority can explain the concern that is felt about having a Roman Catholic president? What are we to think of a political party that openly bases itself on a religious – I did not say ecclesiastical – creed? Just what may a minister of the Word of God say from the pulpit about political and social matters? What is the responsibility of the government to the arts, and in general with respect to the cultural development of its people? Why do we abhor Red China's communes and the interference they represent in the life of China's families?

The consistent modern mind should see no difficulty in experimenting in any way that men themselves might wish. Men have only to follow the dictates of their own (and the only) inner guide of reason in order to achieve the earthly kingdom of blessedness. The will of the people is the only will of God we can know. *Vox populi vox Dei* (the voice of the people is the voice of God). Therefore, experiment to your heart's – no, to your mind's – content. (Note that our problem, because it has to do with the limits of authority, has also to do with

the origin of authority. These are always but two facets of the one problem: structure and origin always go together.) Such a view about the nature and limitlessness of authority is behind the communist experimentation. But that experimentation has had a history, not only in the West in the time of the French Revolution, but also in Russia in the early days of the Bolshevik regime, and the result was the discovery that "something," some mysterious power appears to hem us in in our inordinate (ordo!) desire for endless experimentation; something seems to limit our exercise of our allegedly limitless power. Many shifts in the communist party line can be ascribed, as Vice President Richard Nixon said recently in a statement on the meaning of communism, "to the struggles of conscientious men trying to fit an inconvenient text to the facts of reality."

In spite of the difficulties they encounter the radical or consistent modern thinkers persist. And that is because they *believe*. To adopt a slogan that has been used in Dutch Reformed circles, these radicals are "looking to reason's commandment and blind to the outcome." That is the expression of their faith. The communist at least believes in his

principle. Whittaker Chambers, who knew something about communism, put it this way in the *Letter to My Children* that constitutes the Foreword of his book *Witness*: “Communists are that part of mankind which has recovered the power to live or die – to bear witness – for its faith.”<sup>2</sup>

Chambers’ use of the word “recovered” calls us back to the realities of the situation in our western world. The weakness of the West is its inability to believe something. Unable to embrace any integral Christianity, the West, perhaps to a significant degree because of what yet is left of Christendom in the world, cannot with singleness of heart accept the faith of modern unbelief either. She is like Israel in the days of Elijah, limping between the two sides, critically weak. You will recall the nihilistic utterance of Bertrand Russell that I referred to in yesterday’s lecture to the effect that men cannot discover a single clear aim to be striven after or a single clear principle that might direct them. Since the West is neither cold nor hot, God will spew her out of His mouth. Unless she repent. But where is the

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2. Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952). p. 9.

West's Elijah, you ask? My young friends, we must not forget that Elijah belonged to the old dispensation; we belong to the new. God's Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, and we – you and I – are the West's Elijahs. What do we have to prophesy?

### **Pseudo-Principles of Western Man**

We must not think that western men have simply in their indolence decided that there is no Light to guide them. They have been treated to a whole series of Guiding Lights. The entire history of modern philosophy, until very recently has been one frantically persistent search for some directing first principle.

Some, with Descartes, felt that by applying the method of radical doubt they could finally discover a body of innate or original ideas – *ideae innatae* – to which the name of *lumen naturale* – natural light, or light of (rational) nature – was given. A later twist of this view, influenced by an effete Christendom, was the notion of an absolute conscience, i.e. a conscience that can absolutely distinguish what is right and wrong. Another movement in the modern search for first principles, the one

we know by the name of empiricism, thought that it had come up with certain absolutely ultimate, hard and irresistible “facts,” known as sense-data. A fundamental difficulty is that even in John Locke the word “perception” bears a multivocal meaning (psychical meaning, but also the logical meaning of analytical discernment).<sup>3</sup>

We cannot go through this whole history at this time, but we must remember two things. These men had rejected the Word of God as the Source of certainty, truth and comfort. But they had not ceased to be “believers”: they had simply replaced the Scriptures with their own theoretical reason. These men were scientific thinkers. They never found the firm Ground or sure Principle that they were seeking, and the principal cause of their failure was just that scientific attitude that we discussed at some length yesterday.

The failure to discover an absolute Beginning (Principle) has led many men to turn their attention away from beginnings towards consequenc-

3. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book IV, Chapter 1, Section 2.

es. William James described the method of pragmatism as the “attitude of looking away from first things, principles, ‘categories,’ supposed necessities: and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts.”<sup>4</sup> This is very far removed from any awareness of a creation-structure or creation-order that is, in that other sense of the word, an order or command for our human life-activity. The upshot of our western history is that chilling nihilistic outcry of Lord Russell.<sup>5</sup>

### **Devastating Influence of Positivism**

The positivistic movement, in particular, has had an unusually destructive influence upon men’s insight into society: concentrating on the positive forms which the various societal structures have assumed in history, which always display a changing character, it has overlooked the constant and normative structural laws that God has ordained for our life. This led naturally to a complete levelling of inner structural differences between church and state,

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4. William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 47.

5. See above, p. 119ff.



between marriage and companionship, etc. For example, Harold Laski, in his *A Grammar of Politics* could not find any essential difference between the modern state and a federation of mine workers.<sup>6</sup>

Prof. R.G. Collingwood in his book *The Idea of Nature* states the positivist case on this question very clearly. Speaking of the need for a “somewhat extensive reform in the vocabulary of natural science, such that all words and phrases descriptive of substance or structure shall be replaced by words and phrases descriptive of function,” he writes further:

A mechanistic science of nature will already possess a considerable vocabulary of functional terms, but these will always be accompanied by another vocabulary of structural terms. In any machine, structure is one thing, function another; for a machine has to be constructed before it can be set in motion... to sum this up: in a machine, and therefore in nature if nature is mechanical, structure and function are distinct, and function presupposes structure. In the world of human affairs as known to the historian

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6. Harold Laski, *A Grammar of Politics* (London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938).

there is no such distinction and a fortiori no such priority. Structure is resolvable into function. There is no harm in historians talking about the structure of feudal society or of capitalist industry or of the Greek city-state, but the reason why there is no harm in it is because [!] they know that these so-called structures are really complexes of function, kinds of ways in which human beings behave...<sup>7</sup>

Prof. Dooyeweerd has pointed out that the concept of function employed by the special sciences, which can only grasp the abstract functional relations of things and events within a particular aspect of reality, is not adequate to account for the concrete structures of individuality – e.g. state, church, marriage, family, labor union, etc. – that we experience in everyday life. A structure of individuality is a temporal *totality*-structure, in which *all aspects of the functional world are grouped in a typical way*. There is a constant order or structural grouping of functions. The positivistic point of view, which would allow only “facts” to weigh with us, overlooks the decisive fact that those ‘facts’ are

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7. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) pp. 16-17.

themselves only given to us in definite structures which find their ground not in human arbitrariness but in the divine world-order.

But I am getting a bit ahead of my story. Up to this point I have been concerned to picture – only very briefly and with reference to the point in question – the historical development of the West in order to show the *need* that our contemporaries have of a directing Principle. I have suggested further that it is impossible from a scientific (e.g. positivistic) point of view to see the Order or Structure that pervades our life, and that that “sight” only comes with the (divine) opening of our heart’s eye to see our whole life as religion. But I have asserted that this particular in-“sight” does come with this revelation.

### **Present Status of Sphere-Sovereignty**

Having said that, I must point out that there is a peculiar situation prevailing with respect to the status of the concept of sphere-sovereignty. In the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper succeeded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in making sphere-sovereignty a part of the conceptual appara-

tus of a great majority of the Reformed Christians of his country. Yet, in the Reformed world outside of the Netherlands, except where there has been an influx of Dutch Reformed influence, whether by immigration or otherwise, I dare say you would never hear the term. And not just the term; I suspect the idea itself would not be present, that is, not explicitly, except in a most reductivist sense (e.g. the relation of Church and State). I must qualify myself at this point and say that this has been the case until recently. For especially since the Second World War the vigorous, Scripture-fed thought of a number of Reformed thinkers in the Netherlands has begun to spill over into surrounding countries like Germany and France and Belgium, and indeed even to invade in a small way a number of the southern countries of Western Europe.

At the same time, an opposite tendency is to be noted in American Reformed circles that derive from the Netherlands. Here an explicit rejection of sphere-sovereignty as in any sense a real principle is increasingly making itself heard in recent years. And in no uncertain language! It is widely known that a professor in a certain Calvinistic college has

for a number of years been telling his students that sphere-sovereignty is a sacred cow which they would do well to throw out the window. Now I do not know whether that professor is a practical man. But I would suggest that it is not the simplest thing in the world to throw a cow out of the window. The year before I entered my college, I have been told, a number of upper class-men succeeded after much toil in placing a cow in the third floor study of one of their especially beloved professors. But it took pulleys and tackle and a lot of sweating firemen the next morning to get the cow out of that study window. Imagine how much more difficult the problem would have been if the cow had been sacred, i.e. untouchable. All joking aside, however, while the professor in question dared to say outright what he thought, and in his own peculiar way, there are many in our American circles who substantially agree with him. But I wonder if they really understand the position this inchoate rejection of sphere-sovereignty puts them in. For that same professor is reported to have said in the same connection that in a complex society all we can do is to nudge and see what happens. I would submit

to you that this is essentially the way of life of the pragmatist faith, but also that there is *no other recourse if we are not in possession of a directing Principle.*

### **The Issue**

Pragmatic or principled? Here, my dear young friends, is the greatest issue your generation has to face. The crisis of our age presses us to give an answer. Where are we? What is it to be a Christian, to lead a Christian life? What is it to possess the Word of God? Is there nothing left for us but to nudge, along with the other creeping specimens of our lowly human species, or are we able in Christ to stand in our Office – (calling) – as Man, and oversee what we are doing and what there is to do? Is it true that “the entrance of your Words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Ps. 119:130)? Is it meaningful to pray “Teach me your way, O Lord; I will walk in your truth,” together with what the psalmist wondrously immediately conjoins “give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Ps. 86:11), by which the essential connection between the seeing of the way to go and the seeing of

the religious root-life of our existence is established?

### **Treachery of Traditionalism**

Of course it is true; of course it is meaningful. We are men of a principle and we are not pragmatists. Yet I must here warn you that we may not permit ourselves simply to continue to repeat such pregnant phrases without the quickening insight of a living faith. Orthodoxy is not conservatism. Traditionalism is that quiet final stage of life that ushers in death.

In the Netherlands, in the years following upon the death of Kuyper, the concept of sphere-sovereignty underwent something of a diminution of meaning. It came to be a traditional slogan, often passed on as scarcely more than the conventional symbol that marked off Kuyper's followers from other Netherlanders. The phrase came to mean merely a certain political doctrine and was no longer "seen" as Kuyper had "seen" it. Once thus degraded in meaning, it only took the steadily increasing confusions of a younger generation amid the multitudinous complexities of our twentieth century life to induce many to dispense with sphere-sov-

ereignty as one of those alleged “principles” which the fertile brain of Kuyper had so liberally spilled out over the heads of the unsuspecting “little people.” No doubt this unfortunate development in the Netherlands has served to strengthen the skeptical tendency in Reformed circles of Dutch origin in America. But it was not, I think, the cause. The cause, I feel sure, was the same treacherous traditionalism that was also at work in Holland. Having to tackle the difficult problem of living in the United States, the generation that grew up here since the First World War became so involved in these problems that it gradually became very much estranged from its roots in Dutch reformed experience. Living by faith means living deeply involved and living at a distance at one and the same time. Men got too completely caught up in the immediacies of life. Gradually, this generation became uprooted from those great insights of faith that had been the source of their fathers’ strength. In the meantime, they had continued to pay lip service to the old shibboleths, one of which was sphere-sovereignty. But this notion took on more and more of a hollow sound, and loosened itself from the ongoing stream



of life, much as an old protective covering that has outlived its usefulness is loosened from the living insect. Is it not just what you would expect that the day would come when the young American of Calvinist extraction would suddenly wake up and declare that sphere-sovereignty is meaningless? That is the treachery of traditionalism.

### **Revived Debate: Necessity of Decision**

But then suddenly another voice, a voice with the certain sound of the trumpet, was heard in the languishing land. The men at the Free University who in the middle twenties initiated the movement for a scripturally-directed or Christocentric philosophy began to draw our attention in what seemed like a new and living way to the deep and central scriptural insight that is expressed in Kuyper's concept of sphere-sovereignty. Thus, the issue is drawn, and we must choose.

What, now, in the light of this confused situation I have just been describing, are we to think of sphere-sovereignty? Is it something peculiarly Dutch, that Reformed Christians of other nationalities are not familiar with it? Is it something pecu-

liarily 19th century (or pre-World War I) that 20th century sons and daughters show so little feeling for it? When personally I say to you that in my estimation there is nothing that needs to be understood more than sphere-sovereignty if we are really to see our prophetic-priestly-kingly task in the world, then that is, of course, my privilege, and all well and good. It is a confession of my own faith, and I sincerely think that many of you will give it serious consideration. But ultimately, I must show the *ground* of my faith. Then discussion becomes possible and a perspective opens up.

In the Reformed circles I am close to, I fear that we are often inclined to fall into what is really a species of subjectivism, which avoids the challenge of differing opinions by saying: "You have your opinion and I have mine and that's it." *We* are not the ultimate law; we are creatures, under the law. Thus we have no right to hold opinions that are not soundly grounded in an analysis, *in the light of the Word of God*, of lawful states of affairs. When we act as though we *do* have that right, we have made little gods of ourselves and discussion between supposed gods is precluded. When we do not test our

opinions in debate and otherwise, and when we withdraw from making responsible decisions, we do not come farther. Life loses its dynamic quality; it shrivels up. Having made little gods of ourselves we lose the power to be men, that is MEN in the sense of the “men of God” of the Scriptures. Yet God *made* us to be prophets, and we are *obliged* to speak the *truth*.

Why then do I believe as I do on this matter of sphere-sovereignty? What brought Kuyper to the idea? In what sense is sphere-sovereignty scriptural?

### **The Religious Place of Understanding**

When we begin to discuss this subject, we must not forget that life and human society are there, and need to be explained. There are marital unions between husbands and wives; there are family relationships, social ties and business connections, universities and scholarly associations, artists’ colonies, and the like. And there is a complex interweaving of all of these in what would appear to be an “order” suggesting some kind of an underlying unity. If we do not remember that life in all its variety is there first, we shall be in danger of falling into

a scientific frame of mind. The intellectual “*constructs*” by which men attempt to “see” or oversee in a single picture life and society do not themselves constitute that life and society. That world is there by virtue of the creation fiat, and has not only given rise to a long history of theoretical views of it, but has largely “defied” explanation. Yet the reason for this last fact is not that it has not been given to man to “see” his life and his world, but that man himself has not been standing in the right place to see it properly, that place where all the complex functions assume a meaningful place within the whole. That meaningful place is the *central* place; *it is religion*: man created and placed before God in a covenantal fellowship to render his Creator praise in a whole-hearted service of love and obedience within the length and breadth of the creation.

It may seem strange at first to some of you that I call religion a place. Of course, that does not mean a spatial place, because when I say religion is a place, I mean something beyond all merely temporal aspects. It is with the word “place” as we found it with the word “up” yesterday. It is the bearer of many meanings; it is, as we say, multivocal,

as opposed to univocal. It can have any number of modal meanings. For example, when my friend suddenly does something that hurts me, I can say that there was no place for such an act, that it was not “fitting.” I mean then an ethical “place”; I mean that our friendship excludes what he did. Of a musical composition I can hold the opinion that some subordinate motif or part does not belong, does not have a place in the whole. Then I mean an aesthetic “place.” When someone comes home from a formal banquet and complains that a certain person did not deserve his place at the main table, he is speaking of a social “place.” But besides all these modal meanings of the word “place,” there is that fullness or fulfilment of meaning of the word “place” when we speak of place in its central religious sense. We must not forget what we said yesterday. The world is not the aesthetic “world” or the “world” of science or the “world” of thought or the “world” of economic life. These are all “worlds”; the *world* is the concrete world that God created, headed by and centered in man, the world of God’s wonderful covenant fellowship with us, the world in which all those modal “worlds” assume a place. The fullness

of meaning of the word “world” can be understood only in religion, and so it is also with that word “place.” The question “Where are you?”, which, by the way, God addresses not to Adam and Eve together but only to Adam, is not to be interpreted as “Behind which bush are you?” It means that God did not find man in the place in which He had put him in the creation. This is the religious meaning of “place” and is what I was referring to when I said that man cannot “see” or oversee the world and his life in their integral unity of meaning except as he stands in his place.

### **Sphere-Sovereignty and Integral Sense of Scripture**

I therefore regard it as highly significant that the idea of sphere-sovereignty is so closely tied up with our recovery (from the scholasticism, i.e. theologism or scientism of the theologians) of what the Word of God tells us about the central religious nature of human life and society. In Abraham Kuyper this is especially clear. Where he is dealing strictly with questions that arise in the theological tradition, Kuyper is not always at his best; the tra-

ditional theological motive of the natural and the supra-natural, a dualistic motive that cannot be harmonized with the scriptural revelation of the integral religious unity of man and the world, seems often to have been too powerful even for him. But in his discussion of matters that have to do with life and society in their concrete wholeness, matters which the theologians in their abstract study had left untouched, Kuyper is freed from the hold of traditional motives. Here he is close to the Scriptures, and *it is just in these areas of his thought that we notice the emergence of the idea of sphere-sovereignty*. As I have said, this idea is intimately bound up with the scriptural view that our life in its totality is religion.

### **Scriptural Themes in Kuyper: The Heart**

Let me point to just one or two themes in Kuyper's thought that are related essentially to his recovery of this central meaning of the divine word-revelation. I think first of his radical break in principle – he did not everywhere achieve a breakthrough, not even in his *Encyclopaedie*<sup>8</sup> – with the scientism

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8. English translation, Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of*

that was so characteristic of his time. He wrote, for example, in an article in *De Heraut* that according to the Word of God not the head but the heart is the means to knowledge.<sup>9</sup> He specifically states – as if he might have foreseen the distortion of his meaning which some of his so-called followers are even now busily propagating, a distortion which renders Kuyper’s thought powerless – that he means by the heart not the organ of feeling, but that place in a man where God works, and from out of which He exercises an influence also upon the head and the brain. This recovery of the scriptural meaning of “heart” is one element that simply cannot be missed if we are to understand once more what the Bible means by religion. It is therefore to be regretted that in a number of significant places in his

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*Sacred Theology*, intro. Benjamin B. Warfield, trans. Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954). This volume contains pp. 1-55 of Vol. I and all of Vol. II. Kuyper’s original work was in three volumes, published in a second revised edition by Kok, Kampen, in 1908, 1909.

9. *De Heraut*, No. 79, 15 June 1879.



famous Stone Lectures on Calvinism the English version has rendered Kuyper's *hart* by "mind."<sup>10</sup> In this way that for which we must be most grateful to Kuyper, viz. that in principle he broke through the persistent intellectualism of the scholastic theological tradition and once again opened up to men, after it had been for so long a time overgrown with the weedy growth of useless human tradition, the life-refreshing springs of the divine Word, remains hidden from those English readers of Kuyper to whom we must bring our message. I hope therefore that no publisher will prepare a new edition of this book without first having had the text subjected to a competent scrutiny.

This recovery of "heart" in its biblical meaning is the real ground for Kuyper's positing so sharply the radical antithesis in all theoretical study (science in the sense of "*Wissenschaft*") between the scriptural and all unscriptural standpoints and his pushing the demand for an inner reformation of theoretical thought. And this was necessary in order to see clearly that all that life of theory too is religion, is

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10. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970).

*heart-service* of God.

### **The Idea of “Office”**

A second theme in Kuyper’s thought that I must refer to in the present discussion is his emphasis upon the idea of *office* (Dutch: *het ambi*). One of the reasons why sphere-sovereignty is not clear to us, I am quite confident, is that we have lost out of our modern consciousness an awareness of the role of *office* in our life.

Modern society, with its revolutionary idea of the popular will and of the right of reason to create society as it itself sees fit, has grown to be a levelled society. Each “center of rationality” is equal with every other. In the political world this finds its expression in the concept of an egalitarian democracy, which is simply another way of saying the *vox populi vox Dei* of the French Revolution. And anyone who thinks that such radical ideas do not exist in our lands is due for a rude awakening. I have never forgotten the shock I received when in 1949 I read an article sent from Paris by the editor of a very prominent American newspaper. The French, so I read, were forever complaining that they could not

find out what American foreign policy was, and so could not determine how to adjust to it. The American editor then proceeded to “explain” that what he tried to make clear to the French was that America really could not in that sense have a foreign policy since its position was constantly being modified in response to the postcards, letters, telegrams, etc. that every day streamed into congressmen’s offices from the citizens, who really determine policy.

Any idea of a societal *order* which God has been pleased to govern by a variety of offices remains foreign to modern society. And many, many Christians in reality think every day of their lives in the modern way at this point. Even among us of the Reformed tradition, as we say, there is a general slovenliness in handling matters that express more deeply than words can our loss of the biblical idea of office. In the Netherlands one could often find a formalistic emphasis upon “office,” which is, after all, simply a distortion of revelational truth. But let us not in our reaction against this formalistic error reject the scriptural truth which made the error possible. Let us not here drift – as so much of our life on this continent is a thoughtless drift – into

a modern, rationalistic and revolutionary way of looking at our life and society.

### **“Office” as Service and Administration**

The biblical idea of office brings us to the heart of religion. While the word itself scarcely occurs in Scripture, the idea of office is expressed by such terms as “service,” “servant of the Lord” (Jehovah), etc. Present in the idea are such related concepts as commission or charge or mandate and delegated authority, definite appointment to carry out the mandate. “Office” speaks of service in the first place, but there is the additional idea of preserving order. Thus office in the Scripture suggests the allocation of a particular task (of service in preserving order) and the bestowing of a particular right to perform it. Such office implies first a Sovereign, One whose absolute right it is to give the command, to make the appointment, to hold responsible and then the delegated sovereignty, the right to act sovereignly in the name of the Sovereign by virtue of His commission. Office means therefore limitation; for the person in office is not himself The Sovereign, but stands under the absolutely sovereign authority. We

conclude that office expresses the fact that man is placed to a certain task with a divine calling to perform it. It is the familiar idea of the cultural mandate. How better could one express the scriptural revelation that all our life is religion, a single-hearted service of God in the whole of the creation. For that reason, the concept of office is close to that of the fear of the Lord, in fact, to that of faith and of being a child of God.

Office is not merely service (Dutch: *dienen*); it is also administration (Dutch: *bedienen*): it is service of God and an administering of God's love and solicitude to the creature at the same time. Office as administration (preserving and orderly form-giving) includes the idea that the future weal or woe of what is being administered depends upon whether the office-bearer does or does not serve God. Scripture speaks of a number of such offices that are both service and administration: of prophet, teacher, priest, judge, king, father, husband, etc. The authority of a father over his children does not really lie in his having begotten them but in his having been charged by God Himself with that responsibility. This is a divine ordinance. And that is what

is meant by office.

### **Central Rule of Christ and Church-Institute**

All the offices that thus stand alongside one another in our functional life seem to find their concentration in the office of man as covenant head. And here Kuyper is quite specific. Christ the second Person of the Godhead possesses absolute sovereignty; but to Him as *Mediator* has been given complete (delegated) sovereignty. He is *the* full and complete Office-bearer. And because His mediatorial sovereignty is total, such total sovereignty is nowhere to be found in our life on earth. Total sovereignty cannot exist in two places. Christ has delegated only partial sovereignties to men. In Christ all these sovereignties are united in an undivided service of God that involves no less than the redemption of all of life. Christ was sent of God into the world; "I come to do your will, O God," He Himself confesses.

In this way Kuyper arrives at the idea of the universality of religion or of life (in its totality) as religion, which makes it possible to see the difference between the church-institute and the central religious Rule of Christ. As Dr. Von Meyenfeldt

writes in a recent book:

Kuyper declared that ‘the actual struggle against Satan does not take place in the visible church, not by a long way... that struggle occurs in the hearts, in families, in discussions, public opinion, trade and commerce, in occupation and vocation, science and art, at cradle and grave – in short, the battle is fought throughout the broad scope of life.’<sup>11</sup> For Kuyper, regeneration is the point of departure, the conversion, of the individual, and must therefore precede his life in the church. In other words, regeneration is beyond the action radius of the church-institute. The church’s task is limited to the administration (service) of the Word and its appurtenances.

The office of the church-institute is a limited office: it is the official administration of Word and sacraments. Its office-bearers have a decidedly limited authority. But that Word, though the church as institute carries the responsibility for its faithful proclamation, is Rule for the whole of life, and every other, also limited, administration must each in

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11. Abraham Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno: Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (Amsterdam: Wormster, 4 vols., Vol. II), p. 134, 135.

its delegated sphere and with its bestowed right and responsibility, preserve and give orderly form, according to that Word's light, to the area over which it has been set by the Sovereign and in accordance with the laws that God has put for that sphere. Here in a nutshell is the idea of sphere-sovereignty. Sovereignty in this expression means, as you have seen, *delegated* sovereignty, and also *limited* sovereignty, sovereignty that is limited to a certain sphere. But it carries also the meaning of *coordinate* sovereignties. No delegated and limited sovereignty is subordinated to any other: each delegation of authority is directly from Christ. Thus, for instance, the husband's authority is not derived from the state of which he is a citizen or subject, but from Christ Himself (cf. Eph. 5:23ff with 1 Cor. 11:3). Thus all these coordinate services and administrations do not within themselves display relationships of part and whole, but each of them is part, part of that total service of God that is rendered unto God by Jesus Christ as Head and Root of reborn humanity.

### **Key to Understanding Scripture**

With this construction a great mass of biblical data



falls into place, not only the limited authority of the king in the Old Testament theocracy (II Chron. 26) but also such apostolic instructions as are given in Ephesians 5:15-6:9. The divine delegation of office in the life of the State is clear from many places in Scripture, especially from what Jesus said to Pilate. And the interesting passage in Psalm 82 relating to the judges in Israel – “I said, ‘You are “gods” . . .’ nevertheless ye shall die like men” – simply cannot be understood apart from a distinction between the office and the man who holds the office.

It is not my intention to go on presenting biblical evidence on this occasion. The Groen Club syllabus, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, was prepared to meet just such a need.<sup>12</sup> The underlying theme of that syllabus is human life as a service of God in accordance with the principle of sphere-sovereignty. You will find plenty of biblical evidence there.

### **Delineation of State Authority**

Kuyper lived at a time when state-absolutism was

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12. H. Evan Runner, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*.

a rising tide. To that tendency he directed this prophetic word: the state has as much power as God bestows upon it; no more, but also no less. It sins not only by usurping authority but also when it does not make use of all the authority given to it. The power of the state is constantly limited by that of all the other spheres of life. It does not stand by itself, but is only one of the links in the great chain which holds all the Creation intrinsically together. It cannot interfere in that life which properly belongs to another sphere because God has not delegated its competence therefor. The father, for instance, exercises his proper authority also by divine commission, and the government may not enter into that divine arrangement. Government as *office* is an institution of divine origin, quite independently of whether the persons of the government fear God. The grace of God lies in the existence of the governmental authority itself and therefore we must obey it, but only within the God-ordained limits of its powers. Thus the state takes its place not *above* but *alongside* all the other spheres.

### **Other Illustrations of Sphere-Sovereignty**

A nice illustration of sphere-sovereignty is provided by considering what is involved in the completing of a marriage. Marriage, says Kuyper, is a matter for the bride and bridegroom. It is their solemn oaths to each other that is the essential thing. But, of course, the two families are also involved. And church and state. Neither the state, however, nor the church performs the marriage. But the state regulates the marriage with respect to its civil side and the church with respect to *its* sphere of competence.

The matter of federal aid to education provides us with a second useful illustration. The task of rearing the new generation (of which education is a part) belongs not to the state but to the parents. At this point many Christians might be inclined to deny any involvement of the state in education. Yet the state does have the responsibility of seeing to it that its citizens be sufficiently educated to permit it to continue to compete with other states in international life. If the parents are unable to maintain such an educational process, it is legitimate and proper for the state to provide the extra monies that are needed to secure those educational processes

which it as state requires for its own existence. This is not state intervention in the sphere of parental responsibility; here the state is related *as state* to children who at the same time are citizens.

Likewise, the state does not intervene in the parental sphere when it requires a son to go to war. Here the state is functioning as state in a sphere beyond the competence of the father's delegated authority. The difficulty which most people have at this point is that they confuse "family" with the concrete totality of life-in-the-kitchen. But concrete life is *religion*, and the persons in the kitchen are related to each other in many ways. The son may be business manager of the father. Both are citizens. The mother may be teacher of her daughter at college. Yet in the instituted church both are believers. At the breakfast table we do not have just family, but religion, the totality of life in its diversity of offices. Only persons who think of "family" as concrete and total can declare that the state's summoning of a "son" to army service is an intervention in the life of the "family" and proof that sphere-sovereignty does not exist. Rightly understood, we have here a prime example of what Abraham Kuyper meant by

sphere-sovereignty.

In the address he delivered on the official opening-day of the Free University, Kuyper used a figure to express his grandiose view of human life. We see, he said, that our human life is neither simple nor uniform, but an infinitely complex organism, so put together that that which is individual exists only in groups, and that only in those groups the whole can be revealed. We might call the parts of this one great machine cogged wheels (the spheres). (I am expanding Kuyper's illustration a bit as I go on.) As this machine is put into motion each wheel turns on its own individual axis (law for the sphere), but the cogs slide into each other as is seen in the gear system of a car. The wheels work upon each other, but do not interfere with each other. If, however, one wheel were of its own accord to extend its circumferential boundary, its cogs would crash into the other cogs and damage the operation of the machine.

From such a standpoint Kuyper could point to the fact that in the past when one life-sphere attempted to interfere in the proper affairs of another – e.g. the government in business or churches in

state and vice versa – things did not go well.

### **Scriptural Proof**

I am sometimes asked what texts there are for sphere-sovereignty, and the professor of sacred cow fame has repeatedly stoutly declared that there are none. No; there are not, if you want a single verse. But at least the theologians among us know that a similar state of affairs prevails with respect to such a fundamental doctrine as that of the Trinity. Permit me to quote Benjamin B. Warfield here. In the volume of his collected writings entitled *Biblical Doctrines* he writes:

It is not in a text here and there that the New Testament bears its testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity. The whole book is Trinitarian to the core; all its teaching is built on the assumption of the Trinity; and its allusions to the Trinity are frequent, cursory, easy and confident. It is with a view to the cursoriness of the allusions to it in the New Testament that it has been remarked that “the doctrine of the Trinity is not so much heard as overheard in the statements of Scripture.”<sup>13</sup>

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13. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New

In like manner I would say of sphere-sovereignty that its biblical proof is the integral meaning of scriptural revelation; without sphere-sovereignty the Scriptures simply cannot be understood.

### **Not Cut and Dried**

That does not mean, of course, that every detail in connection with sphere-sovereignty is crystal clear; for it is not. Several troublesome ambiguities in Kuyper's own thought on the matter have been cleared up since his time. Some of you now listening to me may be able to pose some difficulties. I shall try to meet them – if not in the paper then in the discussion afterwards.

The general *fact* of sphere-sovereignty ought, however, to be clear from the foregoing. If all the constantly changing states of affairs (functional processes) of the positivist can nevertheless be shown to be of a *variety of kinds* – e.g. physical-chemical biotic, psychical, analytical – *that are irreducible*, i.e. maintain their distinct identity, *and further display an invariable order of time* – e.g. “the biotic” necessarily presupposing “the physical-chemical” as “ear-

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York: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 143.

lier”; the psychical, the biotic – ; if only to Christ as Mediator is given all-authority, the diversity of delegated and modally limited “authorities” in our human life being a coordinate diversity within that all-authority; if the Kingdom of God is the whole of redirected human life, the diversity of spheres in our life being so many coordinate aspects of that fullness of life; – if these things are so, then sphere-sovereignty is indeed the expression of the very constitution of the whole creation-order, and our knowledge of it – a *religious* or heart knowledge, acquired when through the Power of the Word of God we “see” or “know” Christ and His Kingdom – , is the Directing Principle of our life in the world.

### **A Difficulty**

One preliminary difficulty that may possibly – and with good reason – have announced itself to your mind I should like to discuss here. If sphere-sovereignty is as eminently scriptural, as intimately bound up with the whole structure of the divine word-revelation, as has been proposed here this morning, then how does it happen that knowledge of it did not appear on the scene until Kuyper? This



is, as I said, a justified question. Although to give an answer to it will take a little time, the resulting increased insight into the significance of sphere-sovereignty will amply reward us. Of course, we shall have to be brief, but I will refer you to the literature.

### **Before Kuyper**

In one sense we can certainly say that the theme of sphere-sovereignty did not first appear in Kuyper. Dr. Jan Dengerink<sup>14</sup> discusses in this connection two men of the generation immediately preceding Kuyper's, viz. the great German Lutheran statesman and philosopher, Dr. Friedrich Julius Stahl, and the founder of the Dutch Christian political movement, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, both of them influenced by the Reveil-movement, the revival of Christian belief in Switzerland, to which Robert Haldane of Scotland also contributed of his knowledge of the Word of God by discussing the book of Romans with the – largely Unitarian –

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14. Jan Dengerink, *Critisch-Historisch Onderzoek naar de Sociologische Ontwikkeling van het Beginsel der "Souvereiniteit in Eigen Kring" in de 19e en 20e Eeuw* (Kampen: Kok, 1930).

theological students in Geneva.<sup>15</sup>

### **Stahl**

Stahl's writings show points of contact for the scriptural idea of sphere-sovereignty. As long as he speaks in the context of the Word of God, he shows evidence of an insight into the distinct natures and the independent significance of the several spheres of society. In particular, Stahl sees a guarantee for the existence of independent spheres in the fact that the government is bound to the divine world-order. He sees as such independent spheres the church in the first place, but also the state and marriage. Sometimes – for example, in his struggle against socialism – he even shows an insight into the independent significance of industry. In spite of all this, however, another view of society dominates in his thinking, viz. that of the historicism of the German Historical School.

### **Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer**

Groen van Prinsterer was influenced by Stahl especially in his view of the state, but he gradually be-

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15. J. C. Rullman, *De Afscheiding in de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1930).

came a Calvinist, and thus emphasized much more than Stahl did the lawful character of the world. For him Scripture had a much more direct significance for our functional life in this world. Whereas the Lutheran dualism is felt in Stahl, in Groen we see that the Bible is the infallible divine word-revelation which provides the foundation for law and morals, authority and freedom. Nevertheless, the same historicist view that dominates in Stahl came to play a large role in his thinking too, in the first place because he had not yet seen that the word-revelation was meant to produce an inner reformation of all of life.

For Groen the Word of God provides for our functional life only the limits within which human culture has freedom to develop. Even our science remains for him a more or less autonomous source of knowledge for the truth, and upon it no higher demand is put than that it not come into conflict with the express pronouncements of Holy Scripture. Within the limits set by Scripture (as he understands it) the historicism of his age comes to influence his view of society. History retains for him a relative autonomy with respect to the divine

word-revelation. Of necessity this means that his view of history comes to be governed by another religious ground-motive than that of Holy Scripture. Groen has not yet clearly seen at this point the role of the Word of God in our lives, nor, consequently, the intrinsic connection that exists between that Word and the living of our lives – including our theoretical lives – in the world.

The then current Historical School of thought led both Stahl and Groen to accept, in reaction against the Enlightenment, a view of society in which the independence of the various “spheres,” *with the important exception of the church-institute*, is conceived as an autonomy, within the totality of the State, of subordinate parts that have acquired right of existence in the course of historical development.

About this view I wish at this point to make two remarks. First, that such a view provides at most only a *relative* guarantee of the independence of the various spheres. For what – except the will to be a conservative! (but who wishes to keep *all* historical growths?) – gives the right to call a halt to historical change at any particular stage of it? And

as parts of the State what gives the other spheres any ultimate independence from the State? But even more important, in the second place, is the consideration that by taking historically acquired rights as their criterion of independence these men had no satisfactory way of judging what are really independent spheres.

Both Stahl and Groen excluded the church, as I have intimated, from their generally historicist view of society. This, as I hope will become clearer in a few minutes, was due to the traditional power of the ground-motive of nature and grace, which had dominated thought among Christians about church and state in most periods of the church's history, and took hold of Reformation groups in the Protestant scholasticism that so quickly succeeded upon the first glorious effort at Reformation in the 16th century.

### **Kuyper**

Now we can see that Abraham Kuyper marks a great advance beyond his predecessors. For he clearly grasped the principle of sphere-sovereignty in its universal cosmic significance, and grounded it ex-

plicitly, in the scriptural sense, in the Order of creation. That is, he saw it as creation-principle. But even with Kuyper this was more an intuitive insight than a carefully worked out analysis. He lacked an intrinsically Christian philosophical view of reality, and this, in turn, gave rise to a number of serious ambiguities in his thought. Moreover, in Kuyper too, historicism and the traditional ground-motive of nature and grace play a noticeable role, especially in his works *Anti-revolutionaire Staatkunde* and *Ons Program*.<sup>16</sup>

You will remember that in this section of my lecture I am attempting to explain how it was that an awareness of the scriptural principle of sphere-sovereignty did not arise until the second half of the nineteenth century. Following the study made by Dr. Dengerink I have indicated that before Kuyper, in Stahl and even more in Groen, there was *some* acknowledgement of what we have later come to know as sphere-sovereignty. Where these men were following closely the thought of Scripture, traces

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16. Abraham Kuyper, *Anti-revolutionaire Staatkunde*, 2 vols. (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1917); Abraham Kuyper, *Ons Program* (Amsterdam: H.J. Kruyt, 1880).

of a developing statement of this creation-principle can be detected. But any full maturation of the idea was held in check by the current Historical School, with its view of societal development, and by the more traditional ground-motive of nature and grace. Even in Kuyper, who first consciously articulated the principle of sphere-sovereignty, a consistent elaboration of it was hampered by the opposing influence of the same two factors. In him too we can clearly see a principle derived from scriptural reflection struggling to take on historical form, but hindered by powerful historical forces already long at work that proceed from an opposing principle.

To be able to point to two men in the generation immediately preceding that of Kuyper is, in itself, not much historical evidence, at least not in the quantitative sense. But we are, I believe, beginning to see something. We must remember that from the middle of the 17th century until the Reveil of the early 19th the Protestant movement had largely fallen before the onslaughts of the secularist movement that dominates our modern centuries. With the Reveil came a renewed knowledge of Scripture,

and then at once we begin to see the powerful influence of that Word, and then more and more, in the thought of men like Stahl and Groen and Kuyper. When these men deal with fresh problems in the more immediate light of the divine Word, a distinct principle of societal order begins to come to expression; when they work in more traditional areas and with the traditional or more current humanistic concepts, another principle is felt to be at work. There is struggle here, the struggle to be reformed according to the Word of God from those other (pseudo-) principles that had taken a firm hold on men's hearts and darkened human understanding.

### **Time of the Reformation**

And now I wish to introduce one further piece of historical evidence; for it will serve to strengthen the conviction we have just arrived at. If it is a return to the Word of God that stimulates an expression of the principle of sphere-sovereignty, then why do we not hear of this principle at the time of the mighty Reformation of the 16th century? The fact is that we do.



### Althusius

In recent years Herman Dooyeweerd, dean of the faculty of law at the Free University of Amsterdam, has repeatedly called our attention to the thought of the Calvinistic legal theorist of Herborn, Johannes Althusius (a younger contemporary of Jean Bodin), who in the early years of the 17th century and over against Bodin's ideas of state-absolutism developed a structural theory with regard to human society which was built on an acknowledgement of a divine world-order and the inner nature of the societal spheres. In this theory Althusius pointed out that each of these spheres has its own law, proper to its nature, and its own sphere of authority, which is not to be derived from any other.<sup>17</sup>

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17. See Herman Dooyeweerd, *De Crisis der Humanistische Staatsleer* (Amsterdam: N.V. Boekhandel Ten Have, 1931), p. 147ff and the literature there referred to; *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. III, p. 662ff; *The Christian Idea of the State*, trans. John Kraay (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1968); and *De Strijd om het Souvereiniteitsbegrip in de Moderne Rechtsen Staatsleer* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1950), p. 21f.

Unfortunately, the great Berlin professor of law, Otto von Gierke, in his *Johannes Althusius und die Entwicklung der natur-rechtlichen Staatstheorien*<sup>18</sup> and also in his monumental study *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*<sup>19</sup> and Gierke's pupil, Waldecker, misinterpreted Althusius' organic view of symbiosis, taking it in the biological sense; these men related his doctrine to the (later) secular theory of natural law, with its concept of the social contract and its idea of state-absolutism à la the romantic deist Rousseau. In this way the biblical

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18. Otto von Gierke, *Johannes Althusius und die Entwicklung der naturrechtlichen Staatstheorien*, 4th ed. (Breslau: Verlag M. und H. Marcus, 1929). English translation: *Development of Political Theory*, trans. and intro. Ernest Barker (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).

19. Otto von Gierke, *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, 4 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck V. Verlagsanstalt, 1954). An English translation of a large part of the fourth volume is entitled *Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1950; Beacon paperback edition, Boston, Beacon Press, 1957).

principle of sphere-sovereignty, arising out of the integral reflection of the (Calvinistic) Reformation, has been hidden from our view because the great humanist scholars of our history-conscious 19th and 20th centuries seem generally unable to enter understandingly into modes of thought so very divergent from the big lines of humanistic development. (Here is an important reason why the A.R.S.S. should quickly erect a Center for Higher Studies on a Reformed – i.e. radically and integrally scriptural – Basis.)

Even in Germany, however, there is a beginning of recognition of misinterpretation. Dooyeweerd has referred, for example, to the work *Verfassungslehre* by C. Schmitt:

For Althusius, the people did have the power of law (*potestas constituta*). The secularization of the concept of established authority did not occur until later. By no means can one, like Gierke in his famous work on Althusius, link the concept of a believing Calvinist like Althusius with that of a romantic deist like Rousseau.<sup>20</sup>

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20. C. Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, 1928, p. 77. “Das Volk hat bei Althusius schon eine *potestas constitu-*

But here is not the place to go more deeply into this matter.

### **Calvin**

If I may be permitted just one more step back into history, I should like to suggest that Calvin himself had, from his recovered knowledge of the centrality and totality of the Christian religion, come to some grasp of sphere-sovereignty as the basic principle of cosmic order. The important passage here is *Institutes* IV 11. 1: “For as no city or township can function without magistrate and polity, so the church of God... needs a spiritual polity.”<sup>21</sup>

It is true that Calvin seems generally to have had an eye only for the two magnitudes of church and state, so that we can scarcely speak here of

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*ta.* Die Sakularisierung des Begriffes der konstituierenden Gewalt tritt erst später ein. Auf keinem Fall darf man hier, wie Gierke in seinem berührten Werk über Althusius die Begriffe eines gläubigen Calvinisten wie Althusius mit denen eines romantischen Deisten wie Rousseau zusammenbringen.”

21. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, p. 1211.

sphere-sovereignty in the more elaborated sense in which we have come to think of it since Kuyper. Nevertheless, this passage contains the scriptural idea that the church-institute does not at all exhaust the richness of the Kingdom of God among men, and that in essence the church does not occupy a place *above* all other societal relationships.

Moreover, the late Josef Bohatec, the historian of the University of Vienna who was undoubtedly most at home, of all men of our time, in the sources for Calvin's life and work, and who, in his standard work *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche*<sup>22</sup> demonstrated the weaknesses in Ernst Troeltsch's treatment of the social ideas of Calvin and the other reformers,<sup>23</sup> this Prof. Bohatec – a man, by the way, who, while he lived, was a most ardent supporter of the movement for an intrinsically Christian philosophy – says that although modern scholars

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22. Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (Breslau: Verlag M. und H. Marcus, 1961).

23. Ernst Troeltsche, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, intro. H. Richard Niebuhr, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

are somewhat aware of the Calvinistic view that human society forms an organic unity, i.e. a structure of ordinances which the sovereign God has given to the creation, they have paid little attention to the idea of an organic society in Calvin.<sup>24</sup> That is primarily due to the fact that they have directed their attention almost solely to his doctrine of the church. (You see that we need more scholars than just theologians!) Bohatec distinguishes Calvin's thought from the medieval idea of *corpus christianum* and shows that Calvin's objection to both a world-church and a world-state is this, that not only can neither bring to realization the organic unity that is aimed at but they both bring about disorganization and tyranny. Bohatec proceeds to show that, having rejected both extreme forms of development, Calvin attempts to bring both typical regulations of life into one organic whole. In this he wished to bring out, according to Bohatec, that both, each in its own sphere, must claim indepen-

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24. Josef Bohatec, "De Organische Idee in de Gedachtenwereld van Calvijn," *Anti-revolutionaire Staatkunde* (Kampen: Kok, 1926), pp. 32ff, 153ff, 362ff.

dence since as arrangements or regulations (Dutch: *ordeningen*) put by God they have to be of equal value. The full significance of this observation can only be felt when we compare Calvin's view with the traditional view of his time as to the relation between church and state.

### **Basic Reason for Late Emergence of Sphere-Sovereignty**

We have now seen that not only in the revival of scripturally directed life and thinking in the 19th century but also in the Reformation of the sixteenth, sphere-sovereignty insinuated itself into human thinking. That it did not become more widely accepted and better known is due to the fact that the energies of the Reformation movement were early dissipated and that the Christian revival of the early 19th century was not only limited in its sphere of influence but also checked by its accommodating itself to traditional and current ways of thinking about society.

The failure of the idea of sphere-sovereignty to come into its own was first of all due to the fact that by the time of the Reformation the Christian

Church had for long centuries – actually from the early days of the church fathers (*patres*, patristic age), and in the time of the medieval scholastics – accommodated itself to an imposing edifice of theoretical construction with regard to the state that makes sphere-sovereignty an impossibility. The newly won intellectual converts of the early patristic centuries had, before their conversion, been steeped in that pagan tradition of an all-embracing state-power.

### **Classical View of the State**

Emerging from an undifferentiated form of society, the Greek people had developed a differentiated form in which the state or political power came to assume the place of the all-embracing association in which all other forms of human association are included as parts within the whole.<sup>25</sup> You are, I am sure, acquainted with the Greek conception of the *polis* or city-state. Judged from the scriptural view of sphere-sovereignty, this was a fundamentally

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25. See Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. III and “undifferentiated” in the Index.



distorted conception, a fundamentally misdirected way of life. Any insight into the central Kingdom-rule of Christ being lacking, one of the many spheres of our functional life had become enlarged, blown up far beyond its *proper* sphere – the sphere for which Christ has delegated to its offices His sovereign power – and been made the absolute and ultimate authority.

The seeds of totalitarianism do not lie in certain developments of the 19th century; they are *intrinsic to unbiblical thought* and are found at the very beginning of western political theory. It is this that we still see in the Historical School of the time of Stahl and Groen. Even though other spheres of human life be granted a certain autonomy on the principle of hoary antiquity and acquired rights, as subordinate parts of the political whole these spheres have no basically guaranteed independence; for the part is governed ultimately by the same authority as the whole. The Historical School has not saved us from the levelling and totalitarian tendencies of the Enlightenment.

When the Gospel and the Church came into the Roman world, they found already there a mam-

moth state organization, which was giving increasingly clear expression to its *religious* character in the encouragement of emperor worship: the *imperium Romanum*. Here again the state or political power was the totality, of which marriage, family, etc. were the subordinate parts. The state was thus the *societas perfecta*; all other forms of association were *societates imperfectae*. The emperor was the bearer of the totalitarian authority of the old Greek and Roman heads of states. He was not looked upon as office-bearer in one of life's spheres, which, together with all other spheres, including that of the instituted church, makes up the central religious Rule of Christ in His Kingdom of Righteousness (i.e. the Kingdom where everything is "right" according to the demands of the creation ordinances), thus exhibiting the *religious* nature of reality.

Thus when a Christian living in the Roman Empire referred to the state, he was on the one hand speaking about one kind of human association that is grounded in the creation-order, but on the other only able to point to it as an historical actuality in the distorted form that arises from apostate religion.

### The “Christian” Accommodation

When the Fathers of the Church were confronted with the necessity of relating the new society, the Church, to the state as it existed for them in the Roman Empire, they did not, from a scriptural sense of the structure of reality, re-form or attempt to re-form their state, but rather largely accepted it as it had gradually developed in the historical experience of the classical peoples. Leaving the whole world of interpretation of life and society that was embedded in that (distorted) institution essentially untouched and unreformed by the quickening word-revelation of God, they sought a solution by thinking of the Church as an addition to that civil society.

To use the language of our modern positivistically-minded opponents of sphere-sovereignty, *they stayed with the “facts”* (i.e. adjusted to what was there all about them). But in doing so, let us be sure to observe, *they lost hold of the FACTS*. For in every positive “fact” of human society *there is not only some inescapable structure of the creation ordinances* (e.g. one cannot set up a form of the state that is not somehow bound to the structural requirements of state), but also *the degree of conformi-*

*ty to or deviation from the creation-norm* (which is a command, a norm; not a structural law in the sense of natural laws) that was operative in the cultural forming-activity of the men who “built” the *polis*, built Rome. When a man’s eyes are closed to this fact, whether he be fourth-century church father or twentieth-century positivistic professor, he is, in a very important sense, blind to the integral meaning of the Scriptures, and without their light he will not be in a position to see any social fact for what it is. If men wish to call such blindness sticking to the facts, well and good, provided we all know that “sticking to the facts” means that kind of blindness.

### ***Hinc Illae Lacrimae* (Whence Those Tears)**

By doing what they did the church fathers did not solve their difficulties but only brought a new rash of trouble over our already burdened human race. By conceiving the Church as a society additional to civil society, and by failing to distinguish Church as the Body of Christ from the church as (cultic) institute they had themselves introduced into western society a second totalitarian association. For the Rule of Christ *is* total; the Kingdom of God is the

*total renewal*, in Christ, *of life in all its structures*. Yet the officers of the church-institute possess no such total authority. Frightful tensions, fundamental rifts in authority, had to result. In this way the unity of all spheres of life as aspects of a central service of God in the Rule of Christ could not be achieved.

As Body of Christ the Church would have to effect a reformation (also) of the paganistically distorted structure of the state.<sup>26</sup> Christians “instinctively” – i.e. religiously – felt this; so too did the popes. And the claim of the popes to be Vicar of Christ on earth assumed a more totalitarian authority than is granted to the office-bearers of the

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26. See Colossians 1:20 and J. A. C. Van Leeuwen, *De Brief aan de Colossensen, Thessalonicensen; Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1953), p. 29. This excellent many-volumed commentary is just now being published in an English version as a joint project of Zondervan and Paideia Press. The first two volumes, on Genesis, written by G. Ch. Aalders, appeared in August, 1981 under the title *Bible Student's Commentary*. We can hope that the series will be completed in a short time.

church-institute. But we must always remember in this connection that Kingdom or City of God and church-institute were confused in their minds.

On the other hand, the totalitarian state, as that had developed, could permit no encroachment upon its (total) authority. Here is the origin of the struggle between Emperor and Pope, between State and Church. The problem is still with us, and in the form it has assumed it can never be resolved. For though the state is independent of the church-institute, and vice versa (since both are modally limited authorities in the Kingdom of God), a really totalitarian state (the concept of the classical peoples, of the Enlightenment and, essentially, of the Historical School of jurisprudence) and *the central religious claim of Christ* cannot be reconciled. (The American debate about the first article of the Bill of Rights of our Constitution.) Here we have the root-struggle between true and false religion, what we know as The Antithesis, that conflict which God graciously introduced into our history when He established His Church.

Once the Church had accepted a “natural” realm of civil polity as a concrete area of life not

needing to be reformed by the living Word of God, not only was a foothold given to the rebellious (revolutionary) mind of apostasy, in the form of a totalitarian state, to wage war upon the people of Christ, but, in addition, the Church was compelled to conceive of itself in a reduced way as another concrete area (the *supra*-natural one) *alongside*, i.e. above the “*natural*.”

Thus, the traditional “Christian” “solution” of church fathers and medieval scholastics was no real solution. It allowed a false form of state by denying as a matter of principle that it needed to be reformed according to the Truth of the divine word-revelation. At the same time, it introduced the false notion of a limited (to the supranatural “area”) Rule of Christ through His Word. This having been done, neither state nor church-institute (nor either, for that matter, the central religious Rule of Christ) could be seen for what they are according to the constitutive Will of God. These facts cannot be seen until we have abandoned the so-called positive (i.e. not normed) facts of positivist theory and, illumined in the depth-level of our hearts by the Word, been brought to “see” the reli-

gious root of our temporal existence.<sup>27</sup>

In such a Christian thinker as Augustine there is to be seen the conflict between conceiving state and church as natural and supranatural entities and conceiving the *civitas Dei* (City of God) as the total re-creation of life in all its complexity. There is on the one hand the attempted *accommodation* (synthesis) of the light of the Word of God to the ancient understanding of what the state is; on the other, a real grasping of what God teaches about the central religious authority of Christ the Mediator.

It is this fundamental conflict which Christians have inherited from the beginning of the New Testament church that explains the slow conquest in Christians' hearts of the scriptural teaching about sphere-sovereignty. Let no one here underestimate the historical forming-power of a long tradition. Attachment to the traditional-theory resulted in the *suppression* of the creation-motive of the Christian religion in the Christians' view of reality. It is the slow victory of the Word of God over a powerful

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27. See Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. III, pp. 214-222.



accommodation theory that we feel in the work of Calvin, of Althusius, of Stahl, Groen and even Kuyper.

### **Sphere-Sovereignty from Scriptural Ground-Motive**

We have now seen enough to understand a very significant word of Jan Dengerink's in his book on sphere-sovereignty. On p. 162 he writes:

[In the preceding] it proved repeatedly that the principle of sphere-sovereignty pressed itself upon the several Christian writers as long as the Scriptural motive of creation maintained its hold upon their thought, but that in the actual sociological elaboration they again came under the influence to a greater or lesser extent of universalistic conceptions, of either a scholastic or a modern-historistic origin. At the same time, the synthesis motive of Nature and Grace proved to be responsible, in the last analysis, for the departure from the Scriptural line.<sup>28</sup>

The above I offer in reply to the question how it could come about that a theme so intimately bound up with the heart of the Gospel had to wait so long

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28. Jan Dengerink, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

for explicit acknowledgement.

### **Recent Clarification**

In conclusion I should like to quote one more paragraph from the book of Dengerink. He continues:

With Kuyper reformational thought was seen to have arrived at a critical juncture, since he more sharply than any of his predecessors saw the radical antithesis in scholarship between a Scriptural and an unscriptural standpoint and posited the demand of an inner reformation of scientific thought. It was he who first grasped the meaning of the principle of sphere-sovereignty in its cosmological significance and creational foundation... However, a sociological working out of this principle proved to be impossible without a philosophical theory of reality rooted in divine Word revelation. Having grasped this principle is the real significance of the founders of modern Calvinist philosophy. In particular the professors Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd have been trail blazers.<sup>29</sup>

In Abraham Kuyper, in spite of his intuitive grasp of the cosmic principle of sphere-sovereignty,

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29. Ibid., p. 162.

there is still much of the idea of an autonomy of spheres on the basis of historically acquired rights. But this idea of the Historical School offered no genuine criterion for a sphere. What is a sphere? Kuyper could not really answer this question adequately, because he lacked, as Dengerink writes, a philosophical theory of reality that is truly intrinsically fructified by the divine\_word-revelation. The contemporary philosophical school of the Free University of Amsterdam saw this need, and its theory of the modal scale and of the structures of individuality attempts to provide an answer. I cannot on this occasion go into it any more than I have in the preceding. Suffice it to say that a proper understanding of this theory removes the objection that the spheres overlap. Think of what I said about the family around the breakfast table. Dooyeweerd's theory has enabled him also to work out a much more precise theory about the positive task of the state.

We have come a long way since I raised the question whether we may accept the fact of an industrial society, and whether we possess anywhere such an insight, such a directing Principle, as will

enable us to work in the immediate situations of our complex and disordered society to reform and restore it to the Order of the divine creation-ordinance. My answer is that God has given us a Principle by which we can “see” to do our work. Sphere-sovereignty is an eminently *evangelical* principle: it is given with the Gospel itself. This must be our Christian answer to all the Bertrand Russells and their nihilism.

The world cries out its need of a directing Principle. We, by the grace of God, are the “blessed possessors.” Men who have discovered such pure gold can never belong to a Silent Generation, who have no Cause to strive for. With a proper understanding of sphere-sovereignty we are, in Christ, more than conquerors, more than the equals, for example, of the communists, whose Karl Marx once said that while philosophy had hitherto confined itself to interpreting the world, the point was to change it. For communism, lacking the Gospel, misses the directing Principle of our life. How then can it know that its changes are in the good direction? As a matter of fact, it is well known that also the communist world is plagued by a *pragmatic drift*. But to His people

God has revealed the Principle for the direction of life.

I can do no better than to end with those beautiful words that Prof. Van Riessen wrote in *The Society of the Future*: “Principles are a creation-mandate; they come as such to man in the way of redemption in Christ, and their function is that emancipation of life, with respect to its societal forms, which is intended in that redemption and is first made possible by it. They are links in the chain of redemption, and they only function properly when the man who manipulates them is filled with a truly Christian spirit. Then they become manifestations of that love of the neighbor which is only genuinely possible when it proceeds from the great commandment. Then they become manifestations of respect not for man but for the *calling* of man and thus also for the room he needs to pursue that calling and to give a direct accounting of his life and works; in sum, respect for life as Gottesdienst.<sup>30</sup> Let us forever be thankful that all our life *may* be religion.

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30. Van Riessen, *The Society of the Future*, p. 230. (My translation is from the Dutch original.) 114. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

There is no evangelical theme that is more in need of a forceful, relevant interpretation and application to the world of our time than this one of sphere-sovereignty, which you have so patiently listened to me unfold here this morning. With Prof. Van Riessen I believe, "it is here that the decisive battle will be fought against totalitarianism and for a Christian society."

**Literature:**

In addition to the literature listed at the end of the second chapter of the Groen Club syllabus, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, I would mention:

1. Jan Dengerink, "Das Wort Gottes und die zeitlichen sozialen Ordnungen," *Philosophia Reformata*, Vol. 20 (1955), pp. 97-122;
2. Jan Dengerink, "Ordering van het maatschappelijk leven," *Anti-revolutionaire Staatskunde*, Vol. 30, no. 12 (Dec. 1960), pp. 332-354.

## About the Author

**HOWARD EVAN RUNNER** (1916-2002) graduated with honours from Wheaton College. He earned a Bachelor's degree in theology from Westminster Theological Seminary. He subsequently received an appointment as a junior fellow at Harvard University. After earning a Master's degree in theology at Westminster he travelled to the Free University of Amsterdam where he earned the Ph.D. degree. Runner taught Philosophy at Calvin College from 1951 until his retirement in 1981.

