

# An Uncertain Sound

## An Evaluation of the Philosophy of Hendrik Hart

[Cornelius Van Til](#)

In the series of booklets called Christian Perspectives Dr. Hendrik Hart writes on *The Challenge Of Our Age* (1967–1968).

He wrote his doctoral dissertation on John Dewey. In the introduction to this work he said that his final critique of Dewey is given from the viewpoint of the “Biblically directed world and life-view” that has in recent times found expression at the Free University of Amsterdam under Professors Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. “Within this movement I received my training and to its basic direction I am committed.”<sup>1</sup>

## Life Is Religion

At this point Hart adds: “A basic commitment directing a philosophy is not itself philosophic. Further, since it is basic there can be no question of asking for its grounds. Stated with special reference to philosophy it can be formulated as follows. The cosmos is God’s creation. Man is a creature. The cosmos, including man, is subjected to the structural order of creation, itself creaturely, by God, who is not himself conditioned by it but faithful to it. Creaturely existence is meaning, i.e. any aspect or part of existence taken by itself of necessity refers beyond itself to something else for its meaning. This restless referring comes to rest only in the origin of all existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Again: “Human life, including philosophy, is religion (not religious). True religion is the direction of life through the Word of God to be life *coram Deo*, the referring of the entire creation (inclusive of man) to God.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hart, Hendrik, *Communal Certainty and Authorized Truth, An Examination of John Dewey’s Philosophy of Verification*, Swets and Zeitlinger, Amsterdam, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

“Man chose to live an untrue life, constructed a false religion, attempted to refer the creation to a false origin of his own choosing and construction through autonomous absolutization of himself or some other part or aspect of creation. He remains a creature, subject to the creation order faithfully maintained by God. Human life thus also continued to be religion, be it in a radically different direction and incapable by itself to find the true direction and incapable by itself to find the true direction again. Jesus Christ restored life to its true origin and enables man to live truly through subjection to him in communion with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

## **The Archimedean Point**

It is the consonance with the principles of this philosophy that Dr. Hart sets Dewey's philosophy and his own over against one another as based on two mutually exclusive beliefs. “Once the place is chosen on which one wants to stand to take one's view of reality, once philosophy has found its standpoint, its viewpoint, its sure ground, its Archimedean point, the direction in which the work will develop is in principle determined. For such a starting point is a belief, a certain ground on which one is prepared to act with the ultimacy of conviction and the strength of security. It is ultimately authoritative and it reveals whatever follows as beyond doubt. It becomes the sole and final directing principle. It is utterly beyond verification as much as it is irrefutable. In its basis, on its condition everything following from it is verified. When one clings to it in faith, it unfailingly reveals its consequences as true. It is this, Dewey's creed, which must be searched out in order to see with what credentials he presents his philosophy.”<sup>2</sup>

## **A Biblically Directed Philosophy**

Now I am concerned to discover how on his view he can speak of “the challenge of our age.” How can a believer in a biblically directed philosophy challenge Dewey or any other unbeliever? His own biblically directed philosophy as well as that of Dewey is said to be based on a starting point that “is utterly beyond verification.”

I ask this question not from the point of view of one committed to the Roman Catholic or to the Arminian view of man. I do not ask this question because I think there must be to begin with, an area of interpretation on which the believer

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

and the non-believer agree. There is no such area. The natural man is spiritually blind. Accordingly he does not see himself as a creature made in the image of God. He starts with himself, as the ultimate interpreter of reality. He does not think of the world about him as created and controlled by the providence of the creator redeemer God of man. Instead he holds to pure contingency as enveloping himself, the world and all the gods that be. Thus his principle of diversity is that of pure chance and his principle of unity is a law that is because it must be what he thinks it must be. Starting from himself as autonomous in a bottomless, shoreless, ocean of chance, the natural man swings his logician's postulate and says, in effect that a God such as scripture presupposes cannot exist.

## **Can We In No Sense Reason With Unbelievers?**

Must we then as Christians give up reasoning with unbelievers? If we do then we must also give up preaching or witnessing to unbelievers. Every form of preaching or witnessing to unbelievers involves the setting forth of two mutually exclusive views of God, of man and of the world. The unbeliever can, unless he be imbecile, intellectually follow such a presentation.

The unbeliever may say that the Christian position is unacceptable to him because it is not in accord with logic and fact. Then the Christian will ask him on what he stands when he rejects the Christian view. How do you identify yourself or any fact in your environment in your bottomless ocean of chance? Can you distinguish any "fact" from any other "fact" in a bottomless and shoreless ocean of chance?

Or how, if you could identify yourself or any fact about you, would you discover order or law in the universe? You need a law that will make it impossible for the God of Christianity to exist. You must, in short, make a universal negative judgment about all future as well as all past possibility if you are to make your opposition to Christianity intelligible to yourself.

To say this is not philosophical speculation apart from and prior to Scripture. It is simply to say what Paul asserted in Romans 1. Men are seeking to repress the knowledge of God and ignore his ordinance for them.

Following Paul, Calvin says that man's self-conscious awareness presupposes awareness of God as their creator and law-giver. The universe manifests forth clearly the activity of God within it and within man's conscience in particular. The

evidence of God's presence is everywhere present and everywhere clear. Men must spend their whole effort taking their own eyes out in order to keep from seeing God. And then they cannot succeed. They "know" that their own position is wrong from every point of view. It destroys the possibility of logical functioning in man in relation to the facts of the world. Accordingly when he keeps up his opposition even when he is shown that on his own view all intelligible predication ceases, he does so because he is spiritually blind and morally committed to hating God.

## **Is Christianity Beyond Verification?**

Such being the case, I fear that Hart's thinking is not biblically directed when he says that the starting point of the Christian's position is "utterly beyond verification." It would be utterly beyond verification if by verification one were to mean the possibility of appeal to a view of "facts" and of "logic" on which both parties agree beforehand. But this is not the case. The Christian starts his reasoning from the presupposition that what God, through Christ, says in the Scriptures is true. Accordingly all "facts" are God and Christ created and directed to the consummation of history. All logical activity of man in relation to the factuality of his environment is normally an activity of covenant-keeping man, carried on in the interest of showing forth with ever greater splendor the *magnalia dei*. It is man as a covenant-breaker who assumes (a) his own ultimacy (b) the pure contingency nature of temporal factuality and (c) the ultimacy creative or legislative nature of his logical power and as a consequence ruins himself.

Only the triune God of Scripture takes men out of this depth of intellectual ruin and moral inequity. Those who have been taken out "knew" the difference between their attitude before and their attitude after their regeneration. This difference of attitude pertains not only to God but as well to the world and their fellowmen. They now see all things are what they are in the last analysis because of what the triune God of Scripture has done and does, and will do with respect to him. The very activity of men's intellect and will, he now realizes, cannot take place in a vacuum. His own activity always presupposes God's ultimate activity back of it.

This is the challenge with which the believer must approach the unbeliever. Every fact of the universe in every one of its relationships is the clearest possible evidence for its being what God through Christ in Scripture says it is.

## Defects in De Kuyper's Views

In his day Abraham Kuyper did not see this point. He was properly critical of the apologetic efforts of Doeds and Van Oosterzee. The apologetics of these men resembled that of Bishop Butler, which had been adopted by the "old Princeton" men. Kuyper rejected this sort of apologetic as untrue to the biblical teaching with respect to the total spiritual blindness of man, as taught by Calvin on the basis of Paul. Accordingly, he argued much as Hart now argues. The Christian and the non-Christian positions are simply two faith positions, the one built on the presupposition of the self-sufficiency of God and the other built on the self-sufficiency of man. But Kuyper failed to supplement what he said on this point with what Calvin also said on the basis of Romans 1. The natural man is spiritually at enmity against God but he cannot destroy his constitution as an image-bearer of God. Accordingly, he always remains accessible to the Word and Spirit of God. He cannot be engaged in anything pertaining to his life at any point without being aware of the fact that he is acting the part of a covenant-breaker. He is, as it were, where the prodigal was, i.e. at the swine-trough, realizing that the only provisions he had made for himself since leaving the father's house is the "husks which the swine do eat." His every activity, he knows, involves a denial of his true origin and destiny.

## Kuyper on Apologetics

Kuyper opposed every form of apologetics because he assumed that there could be no such thing as a Reformed apologetics. But then, when, in spite of himself, he engaged in apologetics he employed an apologetics which was built on the assumption that the natural man's position is not wholly bankrupt in principle.

The same thing may be said of Herman Bavinck and of Valentine Hepp.<sup>1</sup>

## Dr. D. H. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd

It was a notable advance upon the Kuyper-Bavinck-Hepp position when Dr. D. H. Vollenhoven published his *The Need for a Christian Methodology*.<sup>2</sup> In this book

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<sup>1</sup> cf., the writer's *Common Grace*.

<sup>2</sup> *De Noodzakelijkheid eemer Christelyke Logica* cf., the writer's review of this work in *The Calvin Forum* and his article in a *Festschrift* for Vollenhoven, on Christian Apologetics.

Vollenhoven shows that the principles of logic cannot function properly unless reality be what Scripture says it is.

It was also a notable advance on Kuyper when Herman Dooyeweerd wrote his article on "Kuyper's Philosophy of Science" ("Kuyper's *Wetenschapsleer*") and when in his various writings, notably in his *Philosophy of the Law Idea*, (*Wysbegeerte der Wetsidee*, 1936) he pointed out that the motive of creation, fall and redemption as set forth in Scripture must underlie a true procedure of man's interpretation of life.

## Dooyeweerd's Concession

However, even in this early work Dooyeweerd did not seem to have the courage of his own conviction. When Hendrik C. Stoker suggested to him that he might better speak of his philosophy as the philosophy of the creation-idea, he rejected the suggestion. Yet Stoker's point was well taken. Dooyeweerd rejected Stoker's suggestion because only Christian philosophers believe in creation while all men are committed to the idea of law. To make contact with non-Christian thinkers we must, therefore, begin with what, as Christians, we have in common with them. This was, in effect, a concession to the principle of scholasticism which he was, above all things else, anxious to destroy.

As a result of this concession Dooyeweerd was never able to make a straight forward challenge to unbelieving thought in terms of the full content of biblical teaching with respect to God, to man and the universe.

Peculiarly in his later works, such as *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* and *The Twilight of Modern Thought* he became increasingly more concessive to what he himself calls "immanentistic" thinking. In a mimeographed syllabus on *Christianity in Conflict* the present writer has attempted to show how and where this is the case.

Dooyeweerd replied to this criticism in his article "Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought" in the book *Jerusalem and Athens*.<sup>1</sup> My criticism of Dooyeweerd in the above mentioned syllabus argued that there is really one way a Christian can challenge non-Christian thinking. And that is by saying that only on the presupposition of the truth of what Scripture teaches about God, man and the world, can human prediction have genuine

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<sup>1</sup> *Jerusalem and Athens*, Critical Discussion on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, Presbyterian Reformed Pub. Co., 1971, p. 74ff.

significance. Every fact of reality is and must be what God through Christ in Scripture says it is. In other words the content of biblical teaching about all things of which man has any experience is the condition in terms of which this experience is intelligible.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Total Content of Scripture as the Presupposition of Critical Thinking**

Only by thus starting from Scripture as the once-for-all finished revelation given to man through Christ in Scripture is it possible to really challenge unbelief. Only then can one refuse to join the unbeliever in the enterprise of scientific philosophic and theological interpretation on neutral ground with him. Only then can the Christian place himself on the position of the unbeliever for the sake of argument in order to show him that on his presupposition of (a) human autonomy (b) pure contingent factuality and (c) abstract formal unity, human predication cannot even get under way.

Dooyeweerd is now unwilling thus to challenge unbelief. He does not want to take the revealed truth of Scripture and offer it to men as the truly transcendental condition, the condition beyond which one cannot and must not go, of human predication. To do so, he says, is to bring in the religious question too soon. Instead of saying that Christian truth is the presupposition of the possibility of analyzing the structure of theoretical thought and experience Dooyeweerd says that we must make our analysis of theoretical thought as such. From a discussion of theoretical thought Dooyeweerd leads from time and then to the supra-temporal self of man. It is only after he has reached this third point that he wants to bring in the distinction between the biblical and the non-biblical ground motives of thought.

It is by thus relegating the confrontation between biblical and non-biblical thinking to a later stage of thinking that Dooyeweerd has given up the possibility of giving to Scripture its rightful place, and he no longer shows that non-Christian thought is apostate thinking, and that the apostate thinker remains subject to the wrath of God even as he frustrates his own experience at every point. Moreover the Christian<sup>2</sup> faith must not be presented to the unbeliever as having at the beginning nothing more to say for itself than the faith of the unbeliever. In short

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<sup>1</sup> *Die Bedingung die die Erfahrung Möglich Machen.*

<sup>2</sup> I have argued this point more fully in my reply to Dooyeweerd in *Jerusalem and Athens.*

faith constructs are, in Dooyeweerd's view, virtually made to be an irrational addendum to "truth" attained by conceptual reasoning in which believers and unbelievers engage together.

## **Hart's Unresolved Dilemma**

Hart first sets the Christian and the non-Christian positions as two mutually unrelatable faith positions over against one another. After that he argues in the old Thomas-Butler style that the non-Christian starting point, method and conclusion are not inherently self-frustrative and God-insulting, but are not as good as the Christian position. The result is that "the challenge of our age" takes on the form of the challenge of such men as want to add religion to science, in a way like that in which Kant wants men to add the realm of the noumenal to the realm of the phenomenal.

In his work on *Communal Certainty and Authorized Truth*, Hart points to a number of "antinomies" in Dewey's thought. Never does he indicate that this fact is fatal for Dewey because, together with all non-Christian thinkers he is, for all his rationalism, also committed to the rationalist idea which contends that only that can be real for man which he by thinking, i.e. by logical reasoning, says must be real, and that Dewey's irrationalism and rationalism cancel each other out.

As it is, Dewey could answer Hart on the matter of autonomy by saying: "Well, all true thinking must be antinomous; it must be an interaction between a pure timeless abstract unity of logic with the pure contingent flux character of factuality. Non-Christian thinkers have, as they think, legitimized the idea of antinomy by showing that without it we have no contact with reality. It is you Christians, particularly you Calvinist Christians, they say, who believe in a God who is above antinomy, a God who determines all temporal reality, who are face to face with basic antinomy. Such a God is, they contend, beyond all human experience. You cannot speak intelligibly to us about him. Yet, you make him the presupposition of the intelligibility of human experience."

## **Hart Has No Answer to Dewey**

To this, Hart would have no reply. He could not point out to Dewey that in his view, he himself as man must have exhaustive knowledge of all reality in order to have any knowledge and that he must, at the same time, have no knowledge of any reality in order to ask any question about any aspect of reality. Hart cannot tell Dewey that on his view all reality must be both utterly questionable and



utterly lit up. In short on Dewey's view man cannot even distinguish between what is antinomous and what is not antinomous. In short on Dewey's view of reality, including man, is one blob of meaninglessness.

Only on the presupposition of the truth of what Scripture teaches can man identify himself or any fact about him and then relate facts intelligently, though not comprehensively to one another.

Hart asks: "How does Dewey interpret the irrefutable data from the history of science?"<sup>1</sup> But what is the point of asking such a question? According to "Dewey's creed" the "history of science," in fact the whole of history is one thing; something that has pure contingency embedded in it. According to Hart, the Dooyeweerdian Calvinist, the history of science, in fact the whole of history, is quite another thing; something that has the plan of the triune God of Scripture back of it. Hart's view of history is "irrefutable" to him but it is also, as a faith principle for him, "utterly beyond verification."

## **Hart Does Not Follow Calvin**

If Hart had followed Calvin, he would have argued that Dewey ought to believe what Scripture teaches because the evidence for it is so abundantly and so utterly clear that men, even while disbelieving, willy nilly must admit that their disbelief is their folly. If men are not now punished for their gross iniquity, says Calvin, they ought not to conclude that there is no God, but rather than God is restraining his wrath and calling them to repentance, til the day when he will visit the just punishment due to them in full measure. It does not worry Calvin in the least that the natural man is spiritually blind. In his good pleasure the triune God of Scripture will give them eyes with which to see the situation for what it actually is. But Hart is committed to a position according to which he cannot say that the activity of God is clearly manifest both within and around man. But if he is not to keep silent he must find a "common ground" of "objectivity" in an area of interpretation on which he and a man like Dewey somehow agree. Having virtually postulated an area of objectivity Hart merely hopes to be able to show Dewey that the Christian position might be considered a reasonable or the most reasonable option to Dewey. Says Hart: "It is irrefutable that science is an almost unthinkable potent cultural factor, producing changes so vast that it is often beyond control. But I fail to see that all this must inevitably lead to the conclusion that existence manifests no constancy of structure, that science progressively

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<sup>1</sup> p. 135.

develops its own structural conditions and that its laws accrue to nature. Why should the irrefutable data not lead to quite the opposite conclusion?"<sup>2</sup>

Will not Dewey grant that starting from the concept of abstract possibility even Christianity may possibly be true? No, Dewey cannot admit such a possibility. His "ultimate commitment" does not permit him to even consider the Christian position as possibly true. "That he has not critically questioned the ultimate ground of his work cannot be objectionable; for this is an impossibility in any case. But one can object to a presentation of such a ground, to his witness of it, without being aware of its natural restless commitment, unconditional surrender, no proof or analysis but confession, not one single question about its consequences but full antecedent reliance. Here I believe that Dewey has failed. But he would have denied it had it been pointed out to him, for such is the nature of his ultimate commitment."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that Hart shows that Dewey's position is ultimately not established not because of "verifiable" reasons but because of an ultimate commitment to man as the unchallengeable reference point in prediction. But the significance of this is, "You too, Dewey, as well as I, have an unverifiable faith controlling all your reasoning about all things." As has been pointed out, on such a basis no challenge to unbelief can be made.

## Naked Propositions

In his book, the *Challenge of Our Age*, Hart follows a similar procedure to that of the book already discussed. In it he wants to give "the needed perspective for this skeptical age."<sup>2</sup> This needed perspective is that of the philosophy of the law idea.

Says Hart: "According to Dewey it is impossible to ask for the truth of naked propositions. And Dewey is right." Christian believers as well as Dewey are interested in setting any proposition in its all-comprehensive context. Dewey "actually says that when we speak of truth we speak of 'the sum of beliefs whose acceptance is necessary to salvation, rather than to a logical distinction.' So far I am in full agreement with Dewey. Which means that, according to himself, we have no idea yet of what he means by truth until we know what life he intends,

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<sup>2</sup> p. 135.

<sup>1</sup> p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> Hart, Hendrik, *The Challenge of Our Age*; the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies; Toronto, Canada, 1968, p. 117.

what he means by salvation, what is the meaning of the successful completion of an action." *Ibid.*, p. 29

The question involved in every "naked proposition" is the final intention of the fullness of life. "Whatever guides life truly to its end is true. And whenever you ask about truth, in whatever situation no matter how small the detail, the answer can only come in terms of the true guidance of a full life." <sup>1</sup>

## **No Challenge to the Covenant Breaker**

Now Dewey is a humanist. One would expect Hart, the Calvinist, to show Dewey, the humanist, that on the presupposition of humanism, human predication is self-refuting. Predication is meaningless if man, a product of pure contingency, must make universal negative propositions about Scripture teaching in order to show his own position involves some final "intention and fullness of life." Nor is such thinking as that of Dewey merely meaningless; it is at the same time wicked. It is the thinking of a covenant-breaker carried on for the purpose of escaping the face of God as it appears in every fact of the universe. The modern scientific methodology on which Dewey depends for the defense of his position and the rejection of the Christian position, is itself an instrument devised by apostate man by which to escape from God. Dewey, as well as every other non-Biblical thinker has cemented a mask to his face, with yellow glasses built into it. He never takes off this mask. Every proposition he makes about every detail of life, whether it be in the numerical, the geometric, the organic or any other dimension of life is a proposition that presupposes the totality picture that springs from the would-be-autonomous man who, in terms of his own principles, cannot even identify himself.

Such a man must be challenged to repentance with respect to the sin involved in every proposition he makes in every "modality," from arithmetic to "faith." Hart does not do this. On his basis he cannot do it. All he can tell Dewey is that he is in formal agreement with him on the need of relating every "naked proposition" to a totality view of reality. As to the content of the Christian and the humanist totality view, Hart merely says that they are exclusive of one another and that Dewey agrees. "Good-bye; nice to have known you." To be sure Hart reasons with Dewey, but not on the basis that only on the Christian is predication possible.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29–30.

Hart asks Dewey to consider whether his position is not “one-sided,” requests him to give the “Christian perspective” a hearing. Has operationalism thus solved the “old problem” as to how unity can be found in pure contingency?<sup>1</sup>

## **Hart’s Fatal Admission**

Hart does speak of the “final consequences” which Operationalism draws out of Humanism. But these consequences are not destructive of human experience. What is left of human knowledge and experience if Operationalism has its way is the idea of “hypothetical knowledge.” Says Hart: “and it cannot be denied that once man becomes the center of the universe, the origin of meaning and the creator of all meaning-limits, the status of human knowledge can hardly be anything better than a hypothesis.”<sup>2</sup>

This is a fatal admission. On pure contingency the idea of scientific hypothesis is meaningless and he who holds that it has meaning thereby incurs the wrath of God. Every proposition about anything and every hypothesis with respect to the relations between facts and their relation to one another presupposes the law-order that Scripture tells about.

But the law-order to which Hart subscribes is not taken exclusively from Scripture. He has taken over Dooyeweerd’s idea of law-order. This law-order, we have shown is supposed to be analyzable by itself. To be sure, this law-order “agrees with” and is even said to be identical with that of Scripture. But to say this is to indicate an unwillingness to take one’s position on Scripture from the outset.

## **No Distinction between A Christian and A Non-Christian Approach to Science**

Dewey depends for the setting forth and verification of his “creed” upon science and its method of verification. Dealing with this Hart does not point out that a truly scientific method must be built on biblical presuppositions and that therefore with his false scientific method Dewey can identify no facts, or relate hypothesis to facts. He does not differ with Dewey on what a scientific method, properly called, is. He merely asserts that the scientific method—which he apparently has in common with Dewey—cannot perform the entire task of obtaining knowledge. “Science may give us command of what are called facts.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31 and 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

But facts are disintegrated bits of information that in themselves are not at all knowledge. When they become integrated in the fullness of our experience to enter into our knowledge, they receive a different status.”<sup>1</sup>

Facts have meaning only “as an integral aspect of an entire event.” Does then the fact as integral aspect of an entire event give us something in terms of which we can challenge Dewey’s restriction of meaning to science? Not at all. The “complex-totality of what is going on here, the meaning of it all, is quite beyond verification, though we know what goes on and though none of us think that this is second-rate and unverified knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> Here we are, with facts and more facts as “dis-integrated bits of information.” When we seek to integrate these facts by means of our scientific method, we discover that “the complex findings of science are themselves theories, i.e., abstraction. When not understood as to their function within the full context of a culture they are hardly understood at all. The full meaning of something is never clear unless it is experienced in function.”

<sup>1</sup> But now “truth is entirely beyond verification. For truth is a matter of the stand I take and of the direction in which I go in that fully integrated intimacy of experience called knowledge. Knowledge and truth, as the Christian unverifiably knows, are matters of the fear of Jehovah and of being rooted in Jesus Christ. This is where we must begin if we want to solve these problems. Begin! This means that we do not first have some idea or concept of what knowledge and truth are and then wonder what on earth these can have to do with the fear of Jehovah and the love of Jesus Christ. For if these ideas or conceptions were not conceived from that origin, they probably have little to do with it.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Scripture Not Used As the Ultimate Standard of Truth**

The reader must not think that in all this Hart, after all, comes back to the simple idea of starting from the Bible and its fact—thought content as the truth by which all assertions and actions of men must be tested. When the “facts” of Scripture are related to one another by means of “concepts” into a “system” such as the Reformed Confessions offer, we can have, says Hart, no certainty with respect to their meaning.

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*Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>1</sup> Op. Cit., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

The experience of certainty is an experience qualified by faith and as such it transcends all theoretical experience, which remains analytically qualified. An analytically qualified act may indeed anticipate certainty, it may approach it, but never reaches it, because the moment of faith is in kind irreducibly different from what can be analytically qualified. Therefore, we say that the reliability of a theory may have a very high probability function, although it never quite gets beyond that. High probability approaches certainty, but is not certainty.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Hart Leads Us Back To Butler**

In all this Hart takes us back to the inconsistency we found in Kuyper. The inconsistency is now too expensive a luxury for Christians, particularly for Calvinists to indulge in. The Reformed Christian has come to the kingdom for such a time as this. All the major schools of philosophy have assumed (a) human autonomy and (b) pure contingency of fact as correlative to pure formal logic for their basic presupposition. In other words the anti-Christian principle of interpretation already present in Greek philosophy has, in modern times, commandeered the notions of “fact” and of “logic” to make them subservient to its covenant-breaking designs.

The Christian can make no sort of synthesis with this approach. “Fact” and “logic” must be shown to have no intelligible function except on Christian presuppositions. When this is done certainty pertains to the fact-thought of Scripture. This fact-thought content is verifiable because it is the presupposition of verification. There are no naked or isolated propositions in Scripture. There are no “facts” which tell us very little. Every fact tells us everything in a way. The dimension or mode of arithmetic has meaning because it is founded on the act of revelation of the triune God. Every man can count but only the Calvinist can account for counting.

Hart’s facts and law concepts are not based on this presupposition of the truth of Scripture. He argues like an idealist philosopher might argue against a pragmatist: facts and laws must be related to a whole, but he does not show that this whole is not some far off divine event in the noumenal realm but is revealed in Scripture as centered in Christ.

To be sure, Hart centers everything in Christ. Nor do I say that his personal commitment is not to the Christ of Scripture. Far from it. I am certain it is. But

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

philosophically he does not set up the Christ of Scripture and the Scripture of Christ as the source of all intelligible predication. On the contrary he operates with a view of "fact" and "logic" as entities that obtain in some sort of neutral sphere between a Christian and non-Christian perspective. This accounts for his inability to present Christianity as the answer to the supposed challenge of our age.

## **And Offers Us No "Breakthrough" in the World of Learning**

Since he has not really shown us how to live with the Scriptures we cannot expect from him the "breakthrough in the world of learning" that he dangles before us if we follow his view of the law structure of the universe. The only time we have the right to speak of a Scriptural mandate is when we take our "system" of truth from Scripture as the sun that lights up all the universe. Hart fails to do this.

He says that it is our responsibility as Christians "to give to this world the only perspective that will give meaning to life." We have a real message viz. that in the paths of the Spirit of God according to his word there is not only an alternative, but the only true solution for which all men now seek. We must get busy. We must, after all, contribute to one large communal effort. This effort will be met by denial, even by our fellow Christians."<sup>1</sup>

Hart adds in a note: "What should be seen here is that the Word of God gives us 'principles' by which to live. It is our responsibility to 'concretize' these principles. In Israel this concretization was done by God himself, to instruct the people in their responsibility. In Christ the Mosaic law has been fulfilled and we have now again the responsibility to give our own concrete expression to the principle of the law."<sup>2</sup>

Hart overlooks the fact that Christ himself and the New Testament as a whole does not only speak of the fulfillment of the law by Christ but gives specific concretizations or positivizations based on the law as fulfilled by Christ. To omit these is to replace specific instructions given by Christ with the interpretation of man.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78–79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

In chapter 5 of his work Hart makes, he says, a beginning with the task now before all true Christians. In this chapter he deals with *The Kingdom of Men* and, in particular, with Harvey Cox's *Secular City*.

As Christians we must "take our position in Jesus Christ and ask, on that basis, whether or not, somehow or other, Cox perhaps also takes that position with us."<sup>3</sup> We must "listen to Cox with loving patience as possibly a messenger of God who is presenting the Christian community with a high bill for some of its grand failures ... "<sup>4</sup>

Surely Cox is right at some points. "Any religion which has as its main concern heaven, the soul and sound doctrine is a religion which preaches secularization by default.... When Cox says that what he means by secularity is turning our passions toward the earth because God did so in Christ, he is saying something which in its depth has not been understood by most orthodox Christians."<sup>5</sup>

Even so, says Hart, if Cox "wishes to remain a biblical Christian" we must disagree with him.<sup>6</sup> Cox himself failed to challenge the false traditional separation between "sacred" and "secular" in the proper way, i.e. against "the background of the biblical witness."<sup>7</sup>

Why did not Cox see that it is the Christian's task "of spiritualizing the world" that we should face?<sup>8</sup> On this point Cox will not follow us. His position "is that of Pragmatism."<sup>9</sup> For him "man is the source of order and meaning of the world."<sup>10</sup> Cox reads the Bible as though it had been the book of Pragmatism all along."<sup>11</sup>

We now understand, says Hart, the nature of the perspective from which Cox works.<sup>12</sup> We must conclude that Cox's perspective comes from a spirit of apostasy moving him along the directive paths of Pragmatism.<sup>13</sup> "For our

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.



spiritual assessment in the light of the Spirit of the Word of God has shown that Cox worked at his problem in the darkness of the spirit of apostasy.”<sup>14</sup>

It appears from all this that, though he speaks of the “spirit of apostasy” in connection with Cox’s point of view he deals with it in piecemeal fashion. Hart knows of no direct confrontation between his own position with that of Cox in order to show their mutual exclusiveness.

In his last chapter Hart says he wants to make “an attempt to outline in a centrally general way the main tendency of the Christian life in this age. The outcome is intended to be a summary—framework for the Biblical life to which our age challenges us.

There will be two main parts. In the first we ask what is meant by the word biblical in the expression ‘biblical living’ and in the second we try to find what is meant by living when we wish to do so biblically.”<sup>15</sup>

We often speak of living “according to the Scriptures.” We spoke of the “immense need for a life with, out of, according to the Scriptures.” We must now deal with the question, “What is meant by the Bible as the Word of God?”<sup>16</sup>

There is no unanimity, even in Reformed circles, on this point. So, for instance, Dr. H. M. Kuitert “lets his theology take its departure in what he calls tradition. In his latest publications and recent appearances here he emphasized the legitimacy of re-interpreting the biblical message in contemporary categories. He seems little worried about the legitimacy of using material foreign to the direction of the Scriptures.” On the other hand “to the increasingly popular designation of Scripture as propositional revelation, a designation which culminates in seeing truth as propositional and in conceiving the Word of God as so many sentences, whereby each sentence becomes a truth and each proposition a self-contained revelation.”<sup>17</sup>

In a note on this second way of thinking, Hart says: “One finds this trend in many shades, all the way from an innocently naive use of a wrong term to a highly dangerous linguistic positivism. It seems that this way of thinking, found especially in evangelical circles, goes back to a positivistic notion of facts and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

truths and is designed to ward off the relativistic onslaught of historicist theologies.”<sup>18</sup>

We note in passing that while Hart does mention the name of Kuitert as representing the one unsatisfactory “direction” of dealing with Scripture he mentions no names who represent Scripture as giving “propositional revelation.”

One thing is certain and that is that the historic Reformed view of Scripture would not fall into either of Hart’s two classes. One could wish that Hart had, e.g. given a statement of Herman Bavinck’s view of Scripture. Bavinck does not conceive of the “word of God as so many sentences, whereby each sentence becomes a truth and each proposition a self-contained revelation.”

Nor is there back of Bavinck’s view of Scripture a view of reality and knowledge that would involve such a view of Scripture.

Bavinck holds to essentially the same view as that of Warfield. In short, Bavinck, as well as Warfield, holds to an organic view of Scripture.

For Bavinck the Scripture constitutes the climax of the redemptive work of God through Christ and his Spirit. The purpose of this redemptive work of Christ is that the world which has fallen into sin may be cleansed from sin and in spite of that sin reveal the glory of God. Mankind is an organism. Revelation, in redeeming mankind, works organically.<sup>19</sup> Working organically in accordance with the laws of creation, God’s redemption in Christ may also be said to be through and through “personal.” “The center of revelation is the person of Christ.”<sup>20</sup> All revelation is historical and not merely an insertion of teaching or doctrine and all history has its center in Christ. There is an ‘orthodox intellectualism’ but Bavinck will have none of it. He shows that it does not spring from anything that is taught in the Reformed Confessions.

## 1. Inscripturation

The inscripturation of the redemptive revelation of God through the person and work of Christ could not possibly involve anything mechanical. On the contrary, inspiration is “an element in revelation” and this revelation is personal and living throughout.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Kampen, 1918, Vol. 1, p. 399.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem.*

So far from seeking access to the person of Christ in spite of Scripture, it is impossible to hear Christ except in Scripture. Instead of depreciating the Scripture we should magnify it as the "last act in which the revelation of God in Christ for this dispensation is completed."<sup>21</sup> The redemptive revelation of God has now reached its climax in the appearance of Christ and in his finished work. What he was and what he did redemptively for the world, he himself has explained to us by giving his Spirit to the apostles so that they should write down the meaning of his work. Herewith the "objective" work of redemption has been finished. The event of Christ has taken place and the meaning of the event has been given to us by Christ himself in his Word. Henceforth the dispensation of the New Testament church appears upon the scene. In it the spirit works in the hearts of men so that they may believe the Word.

Thus the Scripture is always "living youthful word, which God in our time through His people gives to us."<sup>22</sup> In the Scripture "God comes daily to his people."<sup>23</sup> "The Scripture is the daily contact between heaven and earth, between Christ and his church, between God and his children."<sup>24</sup> The Scripture binds us not only to the past but also to the living Lord in heaven who determined that past as well as the present and future.

Reformed theologians have generally followed Calvin in holding to the same high view of Scripture which he held.<sup>25</sup> Calvin regards Scripture to be in the full and literal sense of the Word of God.<sup>26</sup>

Bavinck admits that some Reformed theologians had a more or less mechanical view of inspiration<sup>27</sup>, and then sets forth his own view in opposition to it. It is, he argues essentially the same as that of the Reformers. If we believe the Bible when it speaks of the Trinity and the incarnation, why should we not believe it when it speaks of its own inspiration? Only God knows God and only God can tell us about God.<sup>28</sup> This has nothing to do with a priorism. It is simply to believe God at his word. Bavinck prefers not to speak of a theory of inspiration. It is the Holy Spirit of God who is everywhere operative in the cosmos. All knowledge and art, all talent and genius, come from the Spirit of God. He

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436–437.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

regenerates men so that they may believe and trust in him. He is back of the predictions that the prophets of the Old Testament made. So also in the formation of Scripture he is the Spirit of its inspiration. Thus the inspiration of the Scripture is organically related to all the work of the Spirit in the world, both in providence and in redemption. The Holy Spirit completes the work of the Father and of the Son in the world.<sup>29</sup> "In inspiration, revelation completes itself, obtains its purpose and reaches its end."<sup>30</sup> We are therefore to think of inspiration not mechanically but organically, as merely another aspect of the spirit's providential and redemptive work in the whole of history."<sup>31</sup>

Instead of relating his view of Scripture to a position like that of Bavinck or that of Calvin, Hart does little but make a few aphoristic statements which are apparently as so many truths to be added together into some sort of intelligible whole.

1. The "words 'Scripture' and 'Word of God' are not interchangeable." In numerous places they "speak to us of the Word of God, but in no place do they mean themselves."<sup>32</sup>

"Of course," adds Hart "this merely negative indication does not get us anywhere, unless we can use it to come to a meaningful understanding of the Bible."<sup>33</sup>

We need a view of the Scripture in which "God's revelation has been inscripturated without becoming a scripture, without itself being essentially a book and without disappearing in sentences."<sup>34</sup> In short, "the clue to the Scriptures ... is that they point beyond themselves, that they need to be opened. When the Scriptures are opened to us by the Spirit of the Word it is the Word in its directive power that comes to us in its restorative order."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451.

<sup>31</sup> Van Til, Cornelius, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, Vol. 1 of the Defense of Biblical Christianity Series; Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1967.

<sup>32</sup> Hart, *Challenge of Our Age*, p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

## Hart Virtually Identifies the Inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit with the Enlightenment of the Believer

Having the proper view of Scripture we now also understand what is meant by "biblical living." We cannot live biblically if we have reduced the Word of God to a set of truths, a collection of infallible propositions. For both stand in the way of God's Word-revelation in the Scriptures. They either cause us to look for another authoritative source by which to interpret the Bible, or they mislead us into chaining the power of the Word to a book which will by the very attitude remain closed to the reader."<sup>2</sup> Living biblically requires us to see that the uniqueness of the Scriptures does not lie in its inscripturation of revelation, for "God's revelation is certainly not limited to that book. Nor is the inspiration of the Bible something limited to it alone. For we certainly do not believe that after the Bible was complete God stopped inspiring authors. No, the uniqueness of the Bible is that it is an authoritatively inspired inscripturation of God's Word revelation to his people."<sup>3</sup>

Now then, with this proper view of Scripture we have the canon or rule that we need for biblical living. "The canonicity of the Scriptures is derived solely from the fact that in them the Spirit testifies to the Word,"<sup>4</sup> "and because as a canon the Scriptures give an integral witness of Word and Spirit, the single words and sentences in the Bible are not self-contained authoritative units either."<sup>5</sup>

Hart obviously experiences great liberty by embracing his new view of Scripture. He keeps looking back to the horrible pit from which he has been lifted, the pit of "Biblicism which is essentially a form of idolatry, because it reduces the Word of God to Bible-texts. Carried through to its end, a Bible thus read will finally have nothing to say to us anymore apart from providing us with doctrinal or with so-called rules of faith and morals out of touch with contemporary life."<sup>6</sup>

What a relief it is to be rid of all the "views of the Bible" and to let "The Scriptures be their own witness." We now no longer concern ourselves with a

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

"theological doctrine of Scripture," that is "stated correctly in an orthodox manner in the confession of the church." "Views, doctrines and confessional statements have their place, which is to serve as a formulation of obedient response; meaningful only when such a response is actually there."<sup>7</sup>

Biblical living, is therefore, "living in subjection to the canon of the new creation"<sup>8</sup> "for the fullness of life in a new creation, the totality of human involvement in the Kingdom, would be murdered, as it largely has been, if it were thought to be identical with a system of belief and a code of ethics."<sup>9</sup> Now that we have been relieved of the idea of the Kingdom as a "system of beliefs and a code of ethics" we can talk to Cox intelligently. We can now meet the challenge involved in the Secular City. We now look at the secular city in the light of the Word of God as it really is, i.e. not a "system of beliefs and a code of ethics."<sup>10</sup> We recall to ourselves that "theoretical knowledge really never goes beyond the hypothetical level."<sup>11</sup> Certainty "is an experience qualified by faith and as such transcends all theoretical experience which remains analytically qualified."<sup>1</sup> We also recall that "experimental verification of a theory is—logically speaking unattainable."<sup>2</sup> Our theories are "never certain."

## **Hart Misinterprets the Traditional Reformed View of the Relation of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man**

The reader now realizes what has all the while been going on. Hart has not directly dealt with the historical Reformed "doctrine of Scripture" but he has indirectly dealt with it. He has indirectly rejected it.

He has indirectly rejected it by making a caricature of it and then calling it Biblicistic.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. Cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. Cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. Cit.*, p. 57.

## **And Prepares Us for Capitulation to the Post-Kantian Dimensional Philosophy**

Hart has clearly become enamored of the modern, post-Kantian I-it—I-thou dimensional philosophy to the extent that he uses it as a tool with which to reduce the Reformed doctrine of Scripture to a purely mechanical device with which to state and defend an absolute truth that becomes meaningless on its basis.

If he had taken to heart the significance of Vollenhoven's work on logic he would not have spoken in derogatory tones of a "doctrine of Scripture," and of a "code of ethics."

What seems to horrify Hart is the fact that a doctrine of Scripture should be made up of "facts" cemented together by "concepts." The result would be an intellectual system, and no man, holding to the true religion of the covenant of God could commit himself to such a system. In fact, religious commitment applies to that which is back of or beyond all factual and conceptual questions. Commitment is non-evidential. The actual situation is quite otherwise. It is Hart's artificial separation between religious commitment and intellectual statements about truth that is the source of (a) his rejection of the traditional Reformed view of Scripture and for that reason (b) of his failure to challenge the unbeliever to repentance.

Hart is, in spite of his best intentions, operating with the same schematism of interpretation with which the enemies of the gospel work. He follows Dooyeweerd in holding that "theoretical thought," i.e. the conceptual statement can be intelligently discussed with unbelievers before the question of one's basic religious commitment to one's totality view of things is brought out. But this is precisely what the would-be-autonomous man wants the Christian to say. When the Christian says this much he has already capitulated to the covenant-breaker. For (a) the idea of human autonomy, (b) the idea of abstract, Parmenidean logic and (c) the idea of brute Heraclitean contingency always go together. Grant one and you grant all. Hart has in effect granted one, namely the Parmenidean character of "logic." Thereby he virtually granted all. Vollenhoven shows how "logical manipulation cannot function except it function within, as an aspect of the biblical view of reality. How can logic function in a bottomless, shoreless ocean of chance? How can scientific knowledge even begin its course except upon the presupposition of the truth of the biblical "system" of truth?

What do I mean by a "biblical system of truth?" I mean that God, who is in Christ, my creator, redeemer, has told me about himself and with it about his relation to me and to all my environment, in the words, the sentences, the paragraphs, the books of Scripture. In Scripture I have my Creator-Saviour's letter to me. He tells me I am one of his redeemed people. He tells me what it has cost him to redeem his people. He tells me that he has so loved the world, that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. He tells me for it is the Holy Spirit, who together with the Father and the Son are one God who has inspired the prophets and apostles to give this interpretation of all things for me to believe.

Every word, every sentence, every statement of fact are related to one another because they all have their reason for being in Scripture because together they constitute the triune God's letter to me.

Then I start my own reaction, my own interpretation of the interpretation of all things before me in Scripture. I know that my interpretation together with that given in the "Creeds of Christendom" is nothing more than a re-interpretation. I am a creature made in the image of my creator-redeemer. I therefore foreswear the idea of autonomy. It was the first Adam who brought the notion into the world. Instigated by Satan, he wanted to make his own original interpretation of himself and his environment. Accordingly he assumed that space-time factuality was not God-interpreted, but was purely contingent. God himself was, with man, surrounded by pure contingent factuality. Accordingly he also assumed that the act of the "logical manipulation" which he noticed was an aspect of his self-awareness was something that was "murdering" the contingency character of his "facts." He assumed what Parmenides later expressed, that for any fact to be known by gods or men they had to be conceptually penetrable by them to the bottom. But this meant that their contingency would be lost, and all reality would be one block. It could not be thought of conceptually otherwise than as one block and it could not be anything other than what it can and must be conceptually thought of as being.

The modern "freedom-nature" or "contingency-determinism" scheme of modern philosophy as well as the "form-matter" scheme of the Greeks operate with this scheme. They do so in the interest of suppressing the truth. Yet the scheme is logically self-frustrating and ethically reprehensible to the holy creator-God of mankind.

Why did not Hart plead with Dewey and with Cox and, in short, with modern man to forsake this scheme? Why did he not show them that the ideas of "logic"



and "fact" are alike worse than meaningless on this scheme? Why did he not show no "fact" can be identified in terms of this scheme? If it were to be identified by means of this scheme it would have to be both utterly unrelated or contingent and at the same time lost because utterly reduced to blank identity.

## **Hart's "Challenge" is At Best Not Basic**

Instead of thus challenging the unbeliever to repentance for his covenant-breaking activity in his every field of interest, Hart once more, following the scholastics, seeks to show how the Christian "perspective" does better justice to the facts and to the principles of logic which both the believer and the non-believer have agreed on as not having been pre-interpreted by the triune God of Scripture.

Hart has given modern man no challenge in terms of the Christian message of redemption. That message includes redemption from the false assumptions with respect to the questions of "fact" and of "logic." How can Hart challenge man by means of the Christian perspective unless this Christian perspective include the idea that facts are what they are and logic is what it is because of the all-inclusive plan of God back of, controlling and leading to its climax the whole course of history?

For the purpose Hart would need the very thing he despises, a "doctrine of Scripture" and a "code of ethics." Only in terms of these can he show modern man that his entire problematic is intellectually perverse and ethically suicidal.

Without such a "doctrine of Scripture" Hart has, of course, "no doctrine of Christ." He may speak of taking his stand in or on Christ but the Christ he will then have to take his stand on is Christ-projection of modern neo-orthodox theology. It is the Christ who is wholly hidden because not wholly understood ^ la Parmenides, who is therefore nothing more than a projection of the would-be-autonomous man's ideal of himself.

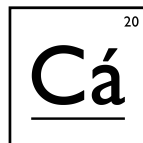
It is not without reason that Hart has next to no criticism of H. M. Kuitert's adoption of the methodology of "New Hermeneutics" of such men as Ernest Fuchs and Eberhard Ebeling. Hart's position offers no real opposition to that of Kuitert.

In fact Hart, no less than Kuitert, assumes the legitimacy of modern scientific and philosophic methodology. All the major schools of modern thought assume

the absolute openness of reality. Why is anything rather than nothing? That is to say they assume the absolute questionableness of all claims to truth. No one knows! At the same time all these modern schools of thought assume the historic Christian answer cannot be true. But you are wrong! They need not add "therefore I am right" that no one knows and that you are wrong.

Would that Hart would challenge modern man to repent and plead for the forgiveness of his sins through the shed blood of Jesus and through his resurrection for their justification. But he would need a doctrine of Christ and a doctrine of Scripture to do that. He would need the Christ who himself has told us who he is and what he has done to save his people from their sins. Such positivization of the principles of Christ must come from man himself; how else can they be his own?

Much more might be said about Hart's philosophy than has been said in this paper. My main concern was to indicate that we need a more truly Christian perspective than Hart has given us if we are to give modern man a reason for repenting from the evil and futility of his ways.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup>Van Til, C., & Sigward, E. H. (1997). *The works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987* (electronic ed.). New York: Labels Army Co.