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What is Christian Philosophy?



by Gerrit Glas

“**W**e must know where to doubt, where to affirm and where to submit. . . .”¹ I would like to use these words of Blaise Pascal to set the tone for my discussion of this question: What is Christian philosophy?²

Doubt! Affirm! Submit! According to Pascal, we can break each of these rules. We shortchange doubt when we claim that everything can be proven. If we acquiesce in everything, we fail to do justice to argument and the ability to make judgments. So too, assuming that everything should be doubted leaves no room for assent.

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I have chosen these words of Pascal—a believer, skeptic, and mathematician—because they evidence the spirit with which the Christian philosophy I have in mind is done. Pascal is not trying to find the golden mean among doubt, proof, and assent. Rather, his thoughts assume and tangibly demonstrate the tension among these three. Doing philosophy is about the thoughtful exploration of that tension—a tension that does not absolve the investigator. The relationship between the thinker and the truth is at stake—a relationship that must be there. Philosophizing requires thinking through the position from which one is philosophically busy.

Be that as it may, the more immediate question might be, “Is Christian philosophy what we need today?” Aren’t we talking about some kind of relic, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms—a “wooden iron,” to use Martin Heidegger’s term?³ Is it not better to keep faith and reason separate? Does “Christian philosophy” deserve a place in the university? Is it not simply faith lurking behind an intellectual façade?

I will address such later, but I want first to articulate where I stand—my (thetical) position, if you will. Doing so fits with the style of philosophizing I am addressing. This way of doing philosophy is interested in the relationship between questions and the questioner. What is the gist—the direction-setting spirit—of the question? What does the person asking the question presume, and what am I being asked to take for granted when engaging that question?

The answer is not difficult when we recognize that the spirit behind these queries is scientism: the conviction that knowledge and insight are legitimate only when matters are substantiated scientifically and can be traced back to empirical data and logical argument. Christian philosophy does not have a problem with hard evidence and cogent argumentation. Rather, the *pretense* of these questions is the issue: the way in which they are posed, the claims they imply. The implicit contention is that science is the only credible yardstick, the last court of appeals when it comes to human knowledge, the key to insight and truth. That claim itself, however, is far from scientific and cannot be confirmed with scientific means. The term Alvin Plantinga would use is “self-referentially inconsistent.”⁴ Herman Dooyeweerd would describe it as “uncritical”—because those who defend this claim have not critically evaluated their own starting point. Had they done this, they would have seen that what they assert presupposes that the theoretical attitude of thought is absolute, that is to say, is impervious and accountable only to itself. But that presupposition deserves critical review.⁵

Returning to the question posed earlier, we would ask, “Do we need Christian philosophy today?” And should not faith and reason be kept separate? These questions may well have been broached by a particular scientific spirit, but does that spirit render them illegitimate? The answer, of course, is “No.” We simply need to pry them loose from the mindset in which they are grounded. Once we have done that, the Christian philosopher, just like every other philosopher, must confront the relationship between these pre-theoretical intuitions and convictions and the insights that theoretical reflection gives. Heartfelt convictions and life-shaping commitments are pre-theoretical in nature. Their content is rooted in a defining attitude: awe, honor, surrender, thankfulness, wonder, a sense of insignificance and deficiency.

Theoretic insight is gained through abstraction and experimentation. Scientists step back from (the nexus of) concrete everyday life, searching for underlying patterns and regularities. They construct or control experimental spaces and then trace the effects of interventions that change one or more variables. A philosopher—also a scientist, albeit

of a certain sort—looks for fundamental connections and foundational structures that usually have to do with things as a whole. Philosophers usually try to gain knowledge about knowledge. The question here is this: Is the basic positioning of the believer at odds with the basic positioning of the philosopher? Is there some connection between these two? And are there ways in which the insights of the believer can be connected with the insights of the philosopher whose work deserves the predicate “Christian” (or, as the case may be, Jewish, Muslim)?

Before proceeding, I want to preview the three steps I will take. First, I will sketch the landscape. What is Christian philosophy? In which forms do we find it? To what kinds of questions does Christian philosophy look for answers?

Second, I will review how the Christian “Reformational” philosophy taught at the Free University (Amsterdam) and elsewhere came to be back in the 1930s. What is happening with that form of philosophy today? Is it still a going concern? And how does it relate to the contemporary context?

Finally, I will engage a theme that, given my own disciplinary background in psychiatry and psychotherapy, is particularly close to my heart, the I-self relationship. I will describe how that theme—how one relates to oneself and the fact that during the course of one’s coming and going one *does* relate to oneself—has helped shape my conception of Christian philosophy. Discussing that theme will bring us back to Pascal, to the thinker who believed and doubted and, despite his great intellect, also knew when to surrender.

The landscape

On paper, Christian philosophy can be conceived of in three ways: as a philosophy devoted to a specific topic or object, as a philosophy that avails itself of a particular approach or method, and as a philosophy that proceeds from a particular sense of inspiration or life commitment.⁶ These distinctions are theoretical; most approaches are an amalgamation of these.⁷

Natural theology and philosophy of religion would be examples of the first form: a *philosophy devoted to a specific topic or object*. Natural theology—

reasoned reflection on the truths of the faith—focuses on questions like these: Does God exist? And if he does, can we (say, on the basis of the teleological ordering of nature) prove that to be the case? Philosophy of religion—certainly of the

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Christian religion—deals with the same kinds of questions, but most often by focusing on epistemological matters: How can God or the absolute be known? What is the warrant for such knowledge? Philosophy of religion also addresses many other themes, like sacrifice, myth, symbols, miracles, religious identity and culture, and religious (life-defining) conviction.⁸

This designation, however, says nothing about the nature of these approaches. They can have a defensive or an offensive intent, as found, for example, in negative or positive apologetics.⁹ In both cases, the method may be either more parsingly analytic or more conceptually systematic. It is interesting to note that most recent academic work in philosophy of religion is trying to resurrect the project of classical natural theology, but this time with modern methods borrowed from analytical philosophy.¹⁰

The second form of Christian philosophy assumes that *philosophizing*, too, *can be done in a Christian kind of way*. There are, I believe, two variants here—a *pluralistic* and a *radical* vision. In the former, Christian philosophizing is assumed to be one perspective among other (non-Christian) forms of philosophy. The radical variant assumes that philosophy is per definition Christian philosophy—a perspective that begs further analysis. There are, as I see it, two different foundational perspectives operative within this (radical) variant: one type could be labeled as “transcendental” and the other as “existential.”

According to the transcendental approach,

philosophy is by definition Christian philosophy, or at least theistic philosophy, because, in principle it is not possible to do philosophy (well) apart from certain theistic presuppositions. According to this kind of transcendental philosophy, God’s existence can no more be doubted than that of the external world or of other minds. Doing so is impossible because every attempt to deny the existence of the external world or the consciousness of others or to reduce these to, say, processes of the brain necessarily appeals to categories that already presuppose the existence of such entities. The self and the person of the other are, in other words, transcendently (necessarily) presupposed and hence irreducible. Some philosophers have applied this argument to the existence of God—God, too, is presupposed in a transcendental way.¹¹ That is to say that we must proceed assuming his existence; otherwise, our thinking and speaking will become thoroughly confused. Theo de Boer has, I believe correctly, pointed out that this classical transcendental approach fails when it comes to the existence of God.¹² Because the self and other minds belong to the world as we know it, the transcendental argument only works when we are dealing with matters empirical. And that is not the case, or at least not in the same way, for God, because God is not present-to-hand as my “self” or the mind of the other. God reveals himself by speaking through his prophets, and his poets bring him closer to us in their musings. We could also say that who God is becomes manifest in the grandeur of nature and in artistic beauty. Nevertheless, we cannot identify his existence with anything in our world. More precisely, there is nothing in reality—no part of nature, no prophetic voice or poetic turn—whose existence we can comprehend solely because we assume that God exists. God may be presupposed but certainly not as a transcendental, as something that must be thought in order to think.

What is there to say about the other radical, more existential approach? Philosophy here is the exploration of different existential attitudes or positions, all the while acknowledging that philosophy itself is not free from such an existential posture or mindset. I know of no philosopher who was more conscious of this intertwinement of content and point of view than Søren Kierkegaard.¹³

His philosophy is an extended journey along all sorts of possible attitudes to life: that of Don Juan, the judge, the evil-natured seducer, the innocent girl, the dogmatician, the systematician, the doubter, the dread-filled one, etc. Each of these attitudes to life is tested for its viability and consistency. Philosophically, the system-builder is naturally the most interesting, and there is no better example than Hegel. Kierkegaard compares Hegel to a man who built himself a magnificent house but forgot that he also had to live in it and, hence, ended up outside in the doghouse.¹⁴ One has to take care of one's own quarters, also in philosophy.

Is Kierkegaard's philosophy Christian in the sense that he develops his own method and manners? Yes and no. Yes, because Kierkegaard's approach is indeed unique: testing one's own station from the inside out, all the while exposing the foolishness and radical nature of the Christian faith. No, because his style and way of working is so personal and even inimitable that one can hardly speak of a "method." What's Christian about his philosophy lies in his testing the existential consistency of various standpoints and, on that basis, incorporating specific points of view. Those points of view clarify the subjective conditions that give ground to faith.¹⁵

And then there is the third form of Christian philosophy, one that celebrates *Christian faith as a source of inspiration*. A broad spectrum of approaches fits this cluster. The key question has to do with how this inspiration relates to the content of philosophy. Once again, I see two primary variants. The one sees philosophy as an explication and further elaboration and articulation of a Christian world-and-life-view; the other provides one set of possible answers to the great perennial questions of humankind.

The first approach clearly leads to world-viewish philosophizing. One's world-and-life view affects all of one's being, and philosophy offers the analytical and conceptual means to clarify and account for one's position. It could also be called comprehensive philosophy in the sense that "worldview" and "philosophy" are often used interchangeably here. Articulating one's worldview serves likewise to convey where one stands with respect to other (non-Christian) approaches.

A hermeneutic philosophy approaches things differently. Because people are beings that desire meaning and a sense of significance, this approach, similarly, sees cultural activity, science, and philosophy itself as responses to this search for and pursuit of meaning and import. A Christian worldview is, then, one possible answer to this quest for meaning: an optional matter of choice and appropriation. In the more nuanced renderings of this hermeneutical approach, the self and its choices are subjected to critical analysis. Those for whom religion is an option place themselves, in principle, outside religion—religion becomes a preference that one may or may not freely choose. From my perspective, however, the pivotal point in religion—at least in Christian religion—is that one's "self" is already taken up in religion's perspective and must be interpreted and understood from that vantage point.¹⁶

Christian philosophy in neo-Calvinist perspective

How should Reformational philosophy be characterized, given the rubric above? Also, what can be said about its development, and what are its prospects?

The character of the works of Herman Dooyeweerd and of Dirk Vollenhoven, both graduates of and professors at the Free University in Amsterdam and the founders of what would later be called "Reformational philosophy," can be summarized with four basic thoughts.

The first basic tenet is the reality of modal diversity: everything in the world can be seen as answering to a number of irreducible/unique norms and laws. This diversity has to do with the modes of being (or functioning) that things, events, and human beings display—a diversity that simultaneously evidences deep coherence.

The second key thought is that what human beings do (or not) is rooted in one's "heart"—the spiritual center of every person. Out of the heart, says the Bible, are the "issues of life."¹⁷

The third point has to do with religion. Religion is neither a mental construct nor a correlate of certain kinds of psychological behavior. Rather, religion circumscribes and informs all of life and constitutes the connection with the origin

of all that is. Everything that is created, all of reality, is connected with the source and origin of that reality.

The fourth of these basic convictions is that reality exists as “meaning.” Although the phrasing could be clearer, Dooyeweerd uses “meaning” to give expression to the Apostle Paul’s confession that all that exists “is from, through, and unto God.” Nothing exists in and of itself. Everything that is points toward an Origin beyond itself and likewise bears witness to the operation of that Origin. The third and fourth tenets are closely interrelated: when emphasizing the connection between God and the world, the focus is on religion; when underscoring and investigating what that connectedness implies, the meaning character of reality is in the limelight.

The first three basic thoughts were, albeit in another form, already articulated by the founder of the Free University (est. 1880), Abraham Kuyper. The spectrum of modal law diversity is a cosmological transcription of Kuyper’s sociological principle of “sphere sovereignty.” Seeing the human heart as spiritual center goes back via Kuyper to John Calvin and Augustine. Being human finds its depth and substance *coram deo* (before the face of God). The notion that religion is something that is not limited to the inner recesses of one’s life, but touches every aspect of one’s life, is also typically Reformational. In that regard, one thinks of Kuyper’s famous line from his lecture at the opening of the Free University in 1880: “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”¹⁸ Or going back further in time, one thinks of one of the basic insights of the Reformation, namely, that the world is not divided into sacred and secular domains but in its entirety gives expression to God’s creating and providential activity. Nothing is neutral, except for the material substratum of things.

The fourth tenet—that reality exists “as meaning”—is, as I said, a bit difficult to digest semantically. After all, how can it be that every thing’s being amounts to “referring and expressing” and yet is “itself” not something?¹⁹ I am inclined to give Dooyeweerd the benefit of the doubt here. The main point is that Dooyeweerd proves himself to

be a modern thinker, particularly in his rejection of any form of metaphysics. He clearly maintains that metaphysics proceeds, per definition, from an autonomous attitude of theoretical thought, such that when one philosophizes about things (beings and their relations), one takes them to be “things as such”—as substances—with (primary and secondary) qualities. And that, even when one does not take these substances to be autonomous, it is inevitable that when the dust settles and one has taken stock of the hierarchy of entities in one’s purview, one will begin to speculate about the *highest*

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Being, the *causa sui*, the uncaused cause of itself and all that is. But, according to Dooyeweerd, philosophizing about (God or) some such highest being is out of the question, at least if it is done without Scripture. In other words, Dooyeweerd, early on, was not alone in opposing this kind of theo-ontology.²⁰

How should one characterize this attempt at Christian philosophy? I don’t think that this is a philosophy with a Christian topic or object, at least not in the first place. Reformational philosophy is not interested in philosophizing about God or about how God knows what he knows or about how one would come to know that; nor are logical arguments seeking to support the truth of specifically Christian presuppositions (nor most anything else) high on the list of priorities. Neither is it the case that this is a philosophy that avails itself of a particular approach or method. The clearest case in point would be the *pièce de resistance* of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy, the so-called “transcendental critique of theoretical thought.” Its explicit intention was to show, with quite ordinary philosophical means, that there is not a philosophy in the world that can operate without a religious start-

ing point. However, there have been few issues in Dooyeweerd's thinking that have more been criticized. Must we then conclude that Reformational philosophy is a philosophy that proceeds from a defined sense of inspiration or life-commitment? At first blush, that is certainly the case. All four main points discussed above clearly have a religiously reflective character. But caution is in order because these (Christian, inspired) insights do not function as foundation so much as, at most, entry points. They are pre-theoretical intuitions that—once transposed to the philosophical level—must still prove their worth. In addition, the validity of some of these intuitions can, in principle, not be proven because they are beyond the grasp and past the limits of theoretical thought. Using terminology reminiscent of Immanuel Kant, Dooyeweerd speaks here of origin, unity, and coherence in diversity as “transcendental ideas.” In addition, he states explicitly that philosophy cannot be an extrapolation of everyday (world-viewish) insight.²¹ To assume that that is what Christian philosophy is all about is to inflate philosophy's place and to misapply one's world-and-life view. Philosophy has its own agenda and remains tied to theoretical abstraction. The perspective that worldview offers is “thicker,” more encompassing and content-rich, and, in certain ways, also more foundational.²²

Are we back where we started? None of the three lines sketched above lead us to suppose that Dooyeweerd's philosophy can be called “Christian.” That's strange because if there is one philosophy in the continental tradition—next to neo-Thomism—that is perceived as being Christian, it would certainly be Reformational philosophy.²³ Are we possibly on the wrong track, or is there something amiss with our rubric? Could it be that the Christian character of his philosophy is more intangible, tied maybe to ethnic ethos or language group?

I think not. I am inclined to admit that my rubric is a bit stilted, but it has served as a catalyst to clarify what is at issue. When we look at Dooyeweerd's development, for example, we see him move from an initial worldview orientation toward a philosophical approach that is more difficult to categorize, in which the Christian character is especially evident in particular focal points

and in a peculiar style of argumentation.²⁴ These focal points are altogether philosophical—origin, unity, reality's coherence and diversity—and classical philosophical themes. And attending to the status of theoretical thought is clearly part of what philosophy is all about. So too, these insights are presented with philosophical argumentation and finesse, with only marginal reference to parallel insights from worldview and religion. What is Christian about Dooyeweerd's philosophy is not owing to the object (approach 1), or to the method (approach 2), and not even to his Christian spirituality or inspiration as such (approach 3). By the time this inspiration has been transformed into philosophical insight, that insight can stand on its own two feet, for it has earned contextual weight and place in the broader philosophical debate. Because the argumentation directed to rival positions is comprehensible and remains philosophically cogent throughout, it is no longer necessary for Dooyeweerd to repeatedly and explicitly refer to Christian starting points.

Thinking that through, we find that the outcome of such a development is one that maintains that true philosophy is Christian philosophy—which is, as we saw, a variant of the second approach (Christian method). Such a philosophy might even argue that the predicate “Christian” is immaterial: there is only good and less good philosophy. Good philosophy converges per definition with Christian insight. Dooyeweerd never went that far, though, because his concept of philosophy is much less brazen. Philosophy remains a theoretical activity and, as such, is limited. It can never grasp the breadth and depth of a religious worldview's insight. The Christian world-and-life view, as we saw, does not allow itself to be taken up and transformed in its entirety into philosophy. A tension remains, such that comparisons back and forth, between philosophy and heartfelt conviction, will always be part of the picture. It is understandable, then, that Dooyeweerd, also later in life, continued to move from religious certainties to philosophy and back again.²⁵

In summary, I see Dooyeweerd the philosopher as someone who came to embrace a very unique position—one that resists the confines of the three-fold rubric with which I began: *Christian*

*philosophy is a philosophy inspired by a Christian world-and-life view, but it is one that qua conceptual articulation and argumentation can stand, intentionally, on its own two feet and take its own insights as thesis into the debate.*²⁶

Is this a case of wanting to have one's cake and eat it too—the claim to be both bona fide philosophy and truly Christian? It is, for those who (like Husserl) take philosophy to be “rigorous science.” But that (idealist) view is subject to the critique mentioned earlier on—the self-referential inconsistency of the assertion that reason must be its own yardstick. Besides, that point of view has lost most of its allure among philosophers of late. Have your cake and eat it too? Well, yes, in a certain sense. But

The Christian world-and-life view, as we saw, does not allow itself to be taken up and transformed in its entirety into philosophy.

as far as that is concerned—and *I can't emphasize this enough*—there is no difference between Christian and non-Christian philosophy. Every philosophy, in a certain sense, is subject to the influence of pre-theoretical convictions and intuitions. And every scientific/theoretical insight that is promoted to the status of philosophy runs the risk of devolving into bad metaphysics. However, more important than this fact is what follows from it: Is one, as philosopher, ready to substantiate one's own insights with philosophical means and to defend these against those insights that rival these?

Dooyeweerd was clearly up to the challenge. His vision and approach led him to a perspective that claimed to be richer, more livable, and internally more consistent than competing perspectives. Exposing and critiquing antinomies was Dooyeweerd's philosophical method in rising to this challenge. Briefly put, his critique presumed that absolutizing one dimension of reality would inevitably lead to internal contradictions in the

philosophies of those who did so. Ascertaining antinomies helps one track down where relative truths have been elevated to absolute truths and, eventually (after many, many steps), to point out a defined order of modal aspects, none of which is absolute (or sufficient unto itself).

How have things fared since Dooyeweerd laid down his pen? Contrary to what is often thought to be the case, Reformational philosophy has never been an altogether homogeneous movement: So many heads, so many minds! Though sometimes confusing for the student, the variations nonetheless prove the point that Christian philosophy is not a matter of course and encompasses a range of ways and means.

I will limit myself to a brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Reformational philosophy. The movement itself was successful both within the Netherlands and internationally; albeit, to my mind, it is underestimated, qua content and impact, in philosophical circles still today. Educationally, certainly within the Netherlands, it has had a significant presence. With recognized chairs in Reformational philosophy at most of the major Dutch universities, it has reached thousands of students who otherwise would have had little or no involvement with philosophy. They were challenged to consider some of the tensions that run deep within our culture and were provided with a vocabulary to name those tensions. They also learned to evaluate critically how the results of research and scholarship are used and maneuvered in society—learning, for example, to distinguish between methodic reduction (or abstraction) and reductionisms. In terms of impact and dissemination, work in the philosophy of technology, the philosophical critique of culture, and the philosophy of law and society was particularly successful.²⁷ Questions about the relationship of faith and science have been addressed on a variety of levels as well.²⁸ Progress has been booked in the philosophy of the natural sciences and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in the philosophy of biology.²⁹ Connections have also been laid with informatics and systems theory.³⁰ Aesthetics has received a good deal of attention, as have philosophical anthropology and philosophy of mind, including the philosophical foundations of psychology.³¹ A start was made in

the field of philosophical ethics, particularly in the form of what today is called the “normative practice” model³²—a model that was subsequently applied to medicine, education, management, and the fields of media and communication. Dooyeweerd’s theory of modal aspects was likewise amended here and there along the way.³³ Strange as it may seem, little has been done in philosophical theology. Likewise, Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique of theoretical thought—originally intended to engage opponents in dialogue—unfortunately remained, by and large, a topic for internal discussion.³⁴ Much energy, seen now after the fact, was also devoted to an intramural discussion of Dooyeweerd’s concept of time.³⁵

And as for the future? I will limit myself to a few broad strokes and then narrow my focus to pencil in a few details. As an academic discipline, philosophy today finds itself in troubled waters. Therein, however, also rests a wonderful opportunity for the Dooyeweerdian variant of philosophy. Contemporary philosophy finds itself in a bind: on the one hand, charting intellectual depth-dimensions and booking scholarly progress seem to call for increasing specialization; on the other hand, specialization makes the field increasingly opaque and inaccessible for most students and irrelevant for “normal” people. At the same time, relevance to and impact on society are increasingly regarded as important marks of philosophy. Running parallel to these quandaries is the fact that (interdisciplinary) connections to other sciences and academic disciplines are not being addressed. Interdisciplinarity, however, is integral to the warp and woof of the Dooyeweerdian tradition—a trump card if there ever was one. Next to the ongoing conscientious work that remains crucial in fields like epistemology, ontology, and the history of philosophy, I see a bright future for further developments in the philosophy of the special sciences, including those disciplines devoted to specific practices (like medicine, psychology, education, management)—yes, I envision the prospect of collaboration on professional ethics with technical and pre-professional schools as well.

Double sensitivity and the I-self relationship

So then, what do I take Christian philosophy to

be? With Dooyeweerd, I take Christian philosophy to be a project that begins with a set of insights, of which the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs (or worldview) is clearly recognized but that does not necessarily need to draw on that background in the process of philosophical discourse. Take, for example, the notion of the irreducibility of the modal aspects, the primacy of the lifeworld for theoretical thought, or the idea that reality does not rest in itself but awaits disclosure—an unfolding defined by the attunement of structure and direction. Christian philosophy wants to stand on its own two feet philosophically by using argument and by seeking to meet the criteria of being consistent, cordial, and comprehensive. I continue to value the Dooyeweerdian type of analysis as a heuristic tool to uncover how a philosopher thinks about the coherence and diversity within reality as well as about its unity and origin. Even though philosophy is not the elaboration of basic worldview beliefs, it does remain connected to them. In fact, I believe that the ways in which the relationship between worldview and philosophy is given shape will result in a more diverse palette than the one-sided transcendental approach that Dooyeweerd himself employs.³⁶ Christian philosophy knows many guises and will usually be defined by how one adapts one’s philosophy to the context in which one operates. That attunement determines how the relationship between worldview and philosophy gets defined.

This way of seeing things softens the contrast some see between analytic and continental approaches to Christian philosophizing. Dooyeweerd’s philosophy has a continental flavor to it—his conceptual handle, a neo-Kantian slant, if you will. His is a very different world than that of the more analytically oriented “reformed epistemology.” One can understand these differences, however, when they are taken in their context. Dooyeweerd used the philosophical means available to him at the time. He assessed his times in terms of the crisis articulated by German historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West* (1918) and called for a much more critical reflection on the foundations of philosophical thought than had already transpired after the demise of German idealism and neo-Kantianism.

Reformed epistemologists speak to a context defined almost exclusively by an analytic style of philosophizing. One usually has no other choice than to avail oneself of the theoretical tools of one's time.

That said, I am convinced that Dooyeweerdians and Reformed epistemologists have much to offer each other. The analytically trained philosopher may well learn from Dooyeweerd's sensitivity for the pretended autonomy of the theoretical attitude of thought or from his aversion to any form of speculation about God and divine attributes. At the same time—further research will have to tell—Dooyeweerd might have been overly sensitive in some things, for example in rejecting any notion of substance (of bare particulars distinct of properties or attributes and as denoting irreducible individuality). On the other hand, Reformational philosophy can learn from the openness and argumentative force of colleagues trained in the analytic tradition, even though those in that lineage may at times rather naively introduce particular truths of the faith or too hastily label them as “properly basic.” I also wonder about the extent to which that same tradition lacks sensitivity for philosophical themes and questions arising within the special sciences—something on which the Dooyeweerdian approach is strong. In any case, I see reflecting on these kinds of differences as a crucial component of Christian philosophizing.³⁷ Exercising one's sensitivity to these matters is crucial: understanding how a thinker relates to the topic at hand and being sensitive to how one postures oneself in that context. Elsewhere I have described this process as cultivating a double sensitivity.³⁸ With a wink to the Danish philosopher, we could speak of a Kiekegaardian footnote to Herman Dooyeweerd's thought.³⁹

Is this not hermeneutical philosophy—in the sense of a sort of meta-level approach to how Christians, but not only they, perceive the relationship between worldview and philosophy, bringing the implicit attitude of the thinker to the surface regarding the topic addressed and, with that, the context within which the project is situated? Yes and no. Yes, it is, in the sense that we are indeed talking here about a form of explication and meaning analysis.⁴⁰ No, it is not, because the hermeneutical approach remains tied to a particular reflex-

ive tradition of thought, which with good reason has been subjected to a good deal of critique—because clearly not everything can be appropriated reflexively (e.g., certain forms of evil) and because philosophizing also develops in relation to that which eludes articulation. My more specific objection is that, before one knows it, hermeneutics—as meta-philosophy of the relationship between worldview and philosophy—takes on a synthesizing and legitimating role and is, in turn, granted a dominant position with respect to insights from the lifeworld. Some forms of deconstructionism, I believe, evidence the same tendency. I have been fascinated by the subtlety of and the intelligence behind those approaches as well as their acknowledgement of finitude, alterity, and openness. But what gnaws at me is the very character of these points of view: the remarkable fact that, for all their subtlety and feel for relationships, one's own hyper-reflexivity is not factored in or accounted for. The form of hermeneutics that I have in mind here remains a form of analysis—an analysis of positions and ways of relating—but it does not become a separate synthetic meta-discipline. In addition, that conceptual analysis looks for support from the analytic tradition, for example, in the analysis of performative speech acts and in the application of the same to social and religious phenomena. Nick Wolterstorff, Charles Taylor, and

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Paul Ricoeur are representative of this approach.⁴¹

Does Christian philosophy then not become a form of navel-gazing—the cultivation of self-interpretations? No, I don't think so. As I said, we are talking about one part, one aspect of Christian philosophizing. Given the double sensitivity referred to above, one can positively embrace the

work done in the various subdisciplines: the critique of culture, the philosophy of the special sciences, professional ethics, central epistemological and ontological themes, etc. The fundamental framework is what is Christian here: the idea of a multifaceted, ordered reality that is not sufficient unto itself and that calls for normed unfolding—a developing that can be denoted in terms of structure, direction, and context. There are huge questions to be grappled with here concerning the nature of “nature” and the notion of “order.” In the world picture of evolutionism, for example, nature and order are contingent, the product of development by happenstance, and humankind simply an epiphenomenon. How that picture relates to the image of a God who creates and rules is obviously also a question worth pondering.

Does this mean that Christian philosophy has no uniquely Christian themes (see approach 1)? After all, what I have argued so far could be summarized this way: follow in Dooyeweerd’s footsteps with a worldview-inspired Christian philosophy that is articulated with philosophical means and an ongoing analysis in terms of structure and direction, a philosophy that allows for more variation than did Dooyeweerd and that emphasizes a (double) sensitivity for how one relates to one’s own points of view and how that relationship is influenced by (and in turn influences) the debate with those who think otherwise. But . . . is that all? Doesn’t Christian philosophy have its own agenda when it comes to matters that are explicitly tied to the content of faith? That is certainly the case.⁴² Indeed, we can go a step further: the perspective of creation, however theological the language, of God’s law as a cloak that fits reality well is one theme already mentioned. But there are other givens for Christian thinking that are almost adverse to or at odds with being thematized: the foolishness of the Gospel; the givenness of an evil that is older and stronger than we are; and the salvation coming from afar through an incomprehensible act of divine sacrifice, as well as the need for conversion, for surrender and spiritual participation “in Christ,” for transformation through the Holy Spirit, for a kingdom that is not of this world and yet one that begins among us, etc. There is a spiritual side to reality that cannot be grasped conceptually and yet

manifests itself—as power, as *dunamis*.

As strange as it may seem, there are possibilities here for philosophers with a less pretentious view of philosophy, possibilities to introduce contrary points of view and unexpected perspectives as suggestions or options having a degree of plausibility. For philosophers with greater expectations—say, a philosopher in the reflexive continental tradition—this is much more difficult, given their preference to comprehend, their desire to assimilate and synthesize. The same can probably be said for analytic philosophers as they key in on logical and argumentative clarity, although it is my impression that that tradition is more open to highlighting the paradoxical aspects of the Christian faith without reasoning them away.

How could it reason them away, without reverting to the company of comprehensive philosophy? Well, maybe we do not have to be so afraid of starting with a comprehensive framework. The works of Johan van der Hoeven and Henk Geertsema provide wonderful examples of this untroubled attitude.⁴³ The kind of translation referred to previously can still be taken up in due course: one that is recognizably Christian and yet one that only avails itself of philosophical means to legitimate its claims. I am aware that there are limits for philosophy in this regard. And yet there are possibilities here, probably more than have been realized to date.

I will limit myself for the moment to my own interdisciplinary field, the philosophy of psychiatry and psychology and, specifically within that field, to topics like fear and evil. The kind of philosophy that I have in mind first carefully delimits which aspects of human behavior can be explained with existing theories and models and which cannot. Once the theories and models have all been considered, one can conclude that there are dimensions of human behavior that elude theory’s grasp and that call for a different sort of vocabulary. For example, in that regard, I have argued elsewhere for implementing a more existential vocabulary when formulating theories about fear and anxiety.⁴⁴ This existential terminology is, in the first place, philosophical—articulating aspects of clinical reality that do not lend themselves to conceptualization in the more special-scientific context of psychiatry and psychol-

ogy as such. For example, with people struggling with pathological fear, there is, in some cases, an empirical, experiential intensity present that often eludes the conceptual vocabularies of psychiatry and psychology—a dynamic intensity that, from a religiously sensitive point of view, could denote the reality of a spiritual dimension. Philosophically

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speaking, things then get very interesting: both conceptual fields, the religious and the scientific, come close to coinciding. And yet they must be kept distinct. Christian philosophers will be tempted to assimilate the spiritual dimension into their philosophizing. Doing so, however, given the limits inherent to the theoretical attitude of thought, would be inappropriate. The languages of each are different and need to be kept distinct, lest annexation and simplistic system-building be the result.⁴⁵ What the philosopher can do is to take note of and to compare the different ways of relating to this dynamic reality—religiously, psychologically, theoretically. Such a comparison could lead, for example, to making the case for an open professional attitude, an attitude defined not only by knowledge and skill but also by spiritual sensitivity.⁴⁶

Similar types of analysis are possible with respect to evil, for example, regarding the evil brought about by people with a sadistic personality disorder. It is not difficult to ascertain that existing theories about sadism and the development of a sadistic personality disorder don't hold much water.⁴⁷ And demonstrating, philosophically or scientifically, that a spiritual dimension is operating in these personalities that could explain sadism is out of the question. To make that claim would be to overestimate philosophy's reach and to suggest that it can actually get a handle on the spiritual dimension of human existence. But, once again, what *can* be done is to carefully distinguish which aspects of this behavior can and which cannot be explained by a particular theory. After considering

the theories available, the philosopher can conclude that there are aspects of such a person's behavior that still beg explanation. These aspects will require a vocabulary that is inevitably ambiguous because, on the one hand, it has to refer to (observable) behavior and, on the other hand, it has to make room for and denote a dimension that eludes sense perception.⁴⁸

Philosophy is, as I suggested earlier, the thoughtful exploration of tensions. As such, it helps create room—room for that which transcends theoretical thought but which can nonetheless not be avoided.

Conclusion

In summary, I see Christian philosophy as a philosophy that is inspired by insights from a centuries-old, long-standing, broad Christian tradition; as a philosophy that, having appropriated these insights, can stand on its own two feet and works to defend its position with arguments. Christian philosophy is conscious of the relation of the thinker to her object, of how influential that relation is, and of the fact that that relation is itself influenced by the context within which the thinker is operating. That is why I have argued for cultivating a double sensitivity and for hermeneutical insight into the way in which the relationship takes shape between worldview and philosophy (on the part of nonChristian philosophers as well). That is my Kierkegaardian footnote to Dooyeweerd's approach. Given its relational and contextual sensitivity, Christian philosophy is necessarily plural: Christian philosophy unfolds within a context and as a certain type of thinking. The Dooyeweerdian variant, undone of its strong transcendental character, still has a strong pedigree, but it needs to be supplemented with a more explicit engagement with typical Christian themes, like evil, suffering, finitude, guilt, reconciliation, and healing. Christian philosophy will always retain an edge, a Pascalian tension: rooted in an age-old faith that is not blithely embraced without critique, it will grant independent thought room to roam without losing sight of its limits, while remaining sensitive to doubt and temptations, knowing that both may ultimately be called to account for what they presume, to make plain what often goes without saying.⁴⁹

Endnotes

1. The aphorism in its entirety reads, “201. ‘We must <have three qualities, Pyrrhonist, mathematician, Christian. Submission. Doubt. They all interlink.> know where to doubt, where to affirm and where to submit when necessary. Whoever does not do this does not understand the force of reason. There are some who fall short of these three principles, either by affirming that everything can be demonstrated, lacking all knowledge of the demonstration, or doubting everything, lacking the knowledge of where to submit, or by submitting to everything, lacking the knowledge of where to discriminate” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995]).
2. This essay is a translation by John H. Kok of Gerrit Glas’s inaugural lecture as Professor of Christian Philosophy (Dooyeweerd chair) at the VU University Amsterdam: “Wat is christelijke filosofie?”
3. Martin Heidegger, “Einführung in die Metaphysik,” *Gesamtausgabe. Band 9* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1935/1983), 6.
4. Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-91.
5. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought. Vol. I* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris/Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953-1958), 34-38.
6. The point here does not concern positions in the debate regarding faith and science; were that the case, a different classification would be called for, for example, that of Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and conceptual issues* ([rev. ed. of *Religion in an Age of Science*] New York: Harper Collins, 1997) or that of Jacob Klapwijk, “Rede en religie in de greep van grondmodellen,” *Philosophia Reformata* 73(2008a):19-43.
7. I will limit myself in this compilation to those forms of Christian philosophy that explicitly attempt to connect philosophy and the Christian faith. Among others, I consulted Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube* (München: Piper, 1948); Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* (New York: Columbia University Press (original: *Critique et la conviction* [1995], 1998); Theo De Boer, *De God van de filosofen en de God van Pascal: Op het grensgebied van filosofie en theologie* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1989); Theo De Boer, *Langs de gewesten van het zijn: Spiritualiteit van de woestijn* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1996); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), as representatives of an existential-phenomenological and a hermeneutical approach respectively. I consulted Hent De Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and E. Evink, *Transcendentie en inscriptie: Jacques Derrida en de hubris van de metafysica* (Delft: Eburon, 2002), as illustrative of a postmodern approach. I consulted C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), as spokesperson for Kierkegaardian thinking. And I consulted Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), as a representative of *Reformed epistemology*.
8. See H. G. Hubbeling, *Denkend geloven: Inleiding tot de wijsbegeerte van de godsdienst* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976); R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
9. See Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian philosophers,” *Faith and Philosophy* 1(1984):253-271; *The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Seminary, 1992); and “Augustinian Christian Philosophy,” *The Monist* 75 (1992):291-319.
10. See, e.g., the work of Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); and the work of the so-called Utrecht school, e.g., Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1992); A.Vos, *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid: een kritische analyse van het absolute evidentialisme in wijsbegeerte en theologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1981); M.Sarot, *De goddeloosheid van de wetenschap: Theologie, geloof en het gangbare wetenschapsideaal* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006); and G. Labooy, *Waar geest is, is vrijheid. Filosofie van de psychiatrie voorbij Descartes* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2007).
11. For Immanuel Kant, who abandoned the attempt to prove the existence of God, things are a bit more complicated. God as the only and all-sufficient cause is presupposed but then as (transcendental) idea to regulate the use of reason’s concepts, not as a concept with empirical content or as a reality behind or beyond the empirical universe (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1787/1976], B713vv).
12. Theo De Boer, *Langs de gewesten van het zijn: Spiritualiteit van de woestijn* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1996), 57-64.
13. Sören Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Classics, 1843/1992); *The Concept of Anxiety: A simple psychologically orienting deliberation on the Dogmatic issue of hereditary*

- sin*, trans. Begrebet Angst, ed. and trans. R. Thomte with A.B. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1844/1960); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1845/1992); and *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1848/1980).
14. Sören Kierkegaard writes, “A thinker erects an immense building, a system, a system which embraces the whole of existence and world-history etc.—and if we contemplate his personal life, we discover to our astonishment this terrible and ludicrous fact, that he himself personally does not live in this immense high-vaulted palace, but in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel, or at the most in the porter’s lodge” (*The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1848/1980], 44). See original: *Sören Kierkegaard Skrifter*, Vol. XI (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2006), 158–59). See for similar remarks Sören Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton UP, 1845/1992, 118–25 (original *Sören Kierkegaard Skrifter*, Vol. VII, pp. 97–103).
 15. C. Stephenn Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 15–17 and 133–49, speaks of a non-evidentialist apologetics that calls for exercising certain receptive dispositions: “openness to the mysterious aspects of human experience, an unselfish willingness to consider whether one’s own attempts to dominate the world are an expression of sinful pride, and an attempt to hope towards the possibility of a life of eternal love for oneself and for other human beings” (148). Evans suggests possible connections between Kierkegaard’s and Plantinga’s non-evidentialistic apologetics; see Evans, 169–82 and 183–205. I have also pursued such a connection with Plantinga’s way of thinking, but then via Pascal’s “the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know” (Glas, “Heeft het theïsme eigen gronden? Alvin Plantinga over de ‘proper basicity’ van religieus geloof,” [*Philosophia Reformata* 65 (2000):170–82.
 16. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
 17. See Proverbs 4.23: the *KJV* uses the word “issues.” Other translations render the Hebrew with “wellspring” (*NIV*), “source” (*NEB*), or “springs” (*ESV*).
 18. The entire sentence reads, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” (James D. Bratt, ed., “Sphere Sovereignty,” *Abraham Kuyper: A centennial reader* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 488).
 19. In my opinion, Dooyeweerd’s definition/description of being as meaning is related to difficulties that others have pointed out regarding his notion of individuality as evident in his theory of individuality- and thing-structures (see Van Riessen, *Wijzbegeerte* [Kampen: Kok, 1970], 182ff, and Danie F. M. Strauss, “An analysis of the structure of analysis,” *Philosophia Reformata* 49 (1984):35–56. Laws play an important role in the definition of “all that which is” as “meaning”; the universal (or at least the domain specific) holding of laws has to do with what holds for an aspect or sphere of reality, which leads to the unattractive thought that the individual this or that is precisely that which eludes what the law’s holding defines.
 20. Is it possible that Dooyeweerd goes too far here? To suggest that metaphysics is connected per definition with absolutizing the theoretical attitude of thought does so in my mind. There are all kinds of metaphysics. Analytic philosophy has engaged classical metaphysical discussions. Versions of Neo-Thomism have developed through discussions with phenomenology and deconstructionists. There are ontologies with a more limited horizon, devoid of any speculation about Being, per se. And yet, even though the temptation to lock God up in a system of necessary truths has few takers of late, that temptation might lie just around the corner, certainly when one takes the perceived need for “pure-thought” on the part of some philosophers into consideration. In that regard, Dooyeweerd’s critique still pertains.
 21. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought. Vol. I* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris/Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953–1958), 128, 158.
 22. Dooyeweerd agrees that the perspective that worldview offers is not an immovable foundation. All kinds of worldview-related insights come up for discussion in philosophy and in the special sciences: cosmological insights, insights from evolutionary theory, insights from the neurosciences or from the social sciences, and insights won in philosophical dialogue with phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstructionists. To typify Dooyeweerd’s position on this point in a few sentences is difficult. In his engagement with a variety of disciplines (mathematics, biology, various social sciences, law) he was clearly open to adjusting his position and to changing terminology (e.g., in his use of the term “enkapsis”). At the same time, he was on the lookout for claims within the academy that helped substantiate insights to which his own systematic reflection had brought him.

23. Where does Thomism, which has something of all three approaches, fit in this rubric? In directing itself to typical Christian topics—the existence of God and the immortal soul, the nature of suffering, etc.—Thomism clearly has its own agenda. Its method is derived from scholastic metaphysics and, for some, augmented by the ways and means of analytic philosophy. Its Christian inspiration is evident as well. For example, when Moreland and Rae (*Body and Soul: Human nature and the crisis in ethics* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000]) say that according to the Bible human beings have a soul that continues to exist after death and then, in passing, add that substance dualism “does the best job of accounting for the biblical data,” we see elements of all three approaches: a Christian theme; a method that hails back to scholastic distinctions; and Christian inspiration (continuity of “the” soul). My difficulties with this approach follow from my conviction that the metaphysical concept “soul” (in substance-dualism) is of an entirely different order than the biblical concept “soul.” For example, the Bible nowhere refers to the soul as being “immortal” or as having an indestructible “nature”—characteristics that Moreland and Rae attribute to the soul on the basis of substance dualism. The (Bible’s) everyday language of faith is here insufficiently distinguished from the theoretical order of philosophical language. At the same time, I realize that a Kantian or neo-Kantian nomenclature (attuned as it is to “boundaries” and to the mandate that empirical limits not be transgressed) may have difficulty doing justice to the “substantive” character of “the” soul. We are be-souled creatures—living beings (Genesis 2.7)—souls who sometimes are downcast and pant and thirst and long to be refreshed. Most know today what is meant by the *soul* of the nation or corporation. It is a term that refers to so much more than being a conceptual construct posited to help one think straight. The challenge remains to craft philosophical vocabulary that keeps one from the currents of ancient and Cartesian views of the soul, all the while respecting the “substantial” character of the soul. Glas (“Christian philosophical anthropology: A reformation perspective,” *Philosophia Reformata* Vol. 75 [2010]:141-189) provides an overview of how this question has been dealt with in the Reformational philosophical tradition; in Glas (“Persons and their Lives: Reformational philosophy on man, ethics, and beyond,” *Philosophia Reformata* 71[2006a]:31–57) and Glas (“Searching for the dynamic ‘within,’” In G. Glas, M.H. Spero, P.J. Verhagen, H.M. van Praag, eds., *Hearing Visions and Seeing Voices: Psychological aspects of biblical concepts and personalities* [Dordrecht: Springer, 2007a]:295–310), I have outlined my own contribution.
24. See Marcel E. Verburg, *Herman Dooyeweerd: Leven en werk van een Nederlands christen-wijsgeer* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1989), chapters 1 and 2; Roger D. Henderson, *Illuminating Law: The construction of Herman Dooyeweerd’s philosophy 1918–1928* (Diss: Vrije Universiteit, 1994) shows how the original emphasis on the idea of a “divine world plan” transitions to the idea of the heart that directs itself to the origin of meaning.
25. I think, e.g., of Dooyeweerd’s *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options* (1979)—see also his *Vernieuwing en Bezinning* (1963). Worldview and philosophy are actively interrelated for Dooyeweerd, although as the years passed, their connects in his own thought did begin to solidify. Worldview breathes insights that philosophizing incorporates as ideas and intuitions. Philosophical reflection, in turn, assesses and critiques world-viewish givens—for example, at points where speculation has gained the upper hand. The context remains transcendental, and the content develops, briefly put, from Calvinistic to ecumenical. The fact that Dooyeweerd’s philosophy becomes ecumenical could be seen as an initial, tentative step towards the view that all philosophy is Christian philosophy. As indicated above, Dooyeweerd himself does not go that far; he warns repeatedly that the limits of philosophy must be kept in mind.
26. Its “standing on its own two feet” does not mean to say, to use Wittgenstein’s analogy, that the ladder (i.e., worldview) can be thrown away after climbing up on it. Dooyeweerd cannot and will not go that far. The movement between worldview and philosophy is one of back and forth. Philosophical positions have the character of a (hermeneutical) project. These projects are adjusted repeatedly, owing to internal philosophical argumentation, but also given feedback from the lifeworld.
27. For the philosophy of technology, see, e.g., Egbert Schuurman, *Perspectives on Technology and Culture*, trans. John H. Kok (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 1995) and *Technology and the Future*, trans. H. Donald Morton (Ontario: Paideia, 2009); Maarten Verkerk et al, *Denken, ontwerpen, maken: Basisboek techniekfilosofie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2007). For culture critique, see Hendrik Van Riessen, *Society of the Future* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957) and *Mondigheid en de machten* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn (1957; 1967); Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A diagnosis of Western society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an economy of care* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); and Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, and David Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times: A new vision for confronting global crises* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007). For social philosophy, see Richard Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An essay in Christian public philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Sander Griffioen and René van Woudenberg, “Theorie van sociale

- gemeenschappen, in *Kennis en werkelijkheid: Tweede inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie*, ed. R. van Woudenberg (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1996), 236–66; J. Govert Buijs, ed., *Als de olifanten vechten... Denken over ontwikkelingsamenwerking vanuit christelijk perspectief* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2001); Jonathan Chaplin, “‘Public justice’ as a critical political norm,” *Philosophia Reformata* 72 (2007):130–150; Jonathan Chaplin, “Beyond multiculturalism—but to where? Public justice and cultural diversity,” *Philosophia Reformata* 73 (2008):190–209; and Abraham Kuypers, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuypers: A centennial reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 461–90. For philosophy of law, see Herman Dooyeweerd, *De modale structuur van het juridisch oorzakelijkheidsverband* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandse Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1950) and Hendrik J. Van Eikema Hommes, *Major Trends in the History of Legal Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1979).
28. See Jacob Klapwijk et al, eds. *Vrede met de rede? Over het vraagstuk van rede en religie, van autonomie en heil* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976); Henk Geertsema, *Het menselijke karakter van ons kennen* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1992); Gerrit Glas, “Modellen van ‘integratie’ in de psychologie en psychiatrie” (I–III), *Psyche en Geloof* 20 (2009),152–193; Jitse M. Van der Meer, ed., *Facets of Faith and Science, Vol. 2: The role of beliefs in mathematics and the natural sciences: An Augustinian perspective* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1996); René van Woudenberg, *Gelovend denken: Inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1992) and “Theorie van het kennen,” in *Kennis en werkelijkheid: Tweede inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie*, ed. R. van Woudenberg (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1996), 21–85. For deep-going, more epistemological analysis, see Stafleu, M.D., “Theories as Logically Qualified Artifacts,” *Philosophia Reformata* 46 (1981):164–89; “Theories as logically qualified artifacts,” *Philosophia Reformata* 47 (1982a): 20–40; *Theories at Work: On the structure and functioning of theories in science, in particular during the Copernican Revolution* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1982b); and “Modelvorming als heuristisch instrument in het wetenschappelijke ontsluitingsproces,” *Philosophia Reformata* 60 (1995):1–15.
29. For an overview, see Stafleu, M.D., “Filosofie van de natuurwetenschap,” in *Kennis en werkelijkheid: Tweede inleiding tot een christelijke filosofie*, ed. R. Van Woudenberg (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1996), 177–202, and Stafleu, M.D., *Een wereld vol relatie: Karakter en zijn van natuurlijke dingen en processen* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2002); see also Jacob Klapwijk, *Purpose in the Living World? Creation and emergent evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008b).
30. See, e.g. Sytse Strijbos, “The Concept of the ‘open system’: Another machine metaphor for the organism?” in *Facets of Faith and Science, Vol. 3: The role of beliefs in the natural sciences*, ed. J.M. van der Meer (Lanham: University of America Press, 1996b), 157–68, and “The concept of hierarchy in contemporary systems thinking: A key to overcoming reductionism?” in *Facets of Faith and Science, Vol. 3: The role of beliefs in the natural sciences*, ed. J.M. van der Meer (Lanham: University of America Press, 1996b), 243–56; see also Strijbos, Sytse, and Basden, eds., *In Search of an Integrative Vision of Technology: Interdisciplinary studies in information systems* (New York: Springer, 1996), and Andrew Basden, *Philosophical Frameworks for Understanding Information Systems* (Hershey/London: IGI-Publishing, 2008).
31. For aesthetics, see Calvin Seerveld, “Imaginativity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 4: (1987), 43–58; Calvin Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative steps in understanding art* (Toronto: TorontoTuppence Press, 2000); and Adrienne Chaplin-Dengerink, *Mind, Body, and Art: The problem of meaning in the cognitive aesthetics of Susanne K. Langer* (Diss: Vrije Universiteit, 1999). For philosophical anthropology, see Gerrit Glas, “De mens: Schets van een antropologie vanuit reformatorisch wijsgerig perspectief,” in *Kennis en werkelijkheid*, ed. R. van Woudenberg (Kok: Kampen, 1996), 86–142. For the philosophy of medicine, psychology, and psychiatry, see Bart S Cusveller, *Met zorg verbonden: Een filosofische studie naar de zindimensie van verpleegkundige zorgverlening* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2004); Glas, Churchland, Kandel, and Dooyeweerd, on the reducibility of mind states, in *Philosophia Reformata* 67 (2002):148–72; Glas, “Ambigüiteit in Kandel’s neurowetenschappelijke fundering van de psychiatrie,” *Tijdschrift voor Psychiatrie* 48 (2007b):849–56; Glas, “Neurowetenschap en de vrije wil,” in *Omhoog kijken in platland: Over geloven in de wetenschap*, eds. C. Dekker, R. van Woudenberg and G. van den Brink (Kampen: Ten Have, 2007c), 221–42; Glas, “Modellen van ‘integratie’ in de psychologie en psychiatrie” (I–III), *Psyche en Geloof* 20 (2009):152–93; and Willem J. Ouweneel, *De leer van de mens: Proeve van een christelijke-wijsgerige antropologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1986).
32. For ethics in general, André Troost, *The Christian Ethos: A philosophical survey* (Patmos: Bloemfontein, 1983); Troost, “Normativiteit: Oorsprong en ondergang van het denken over scheppingsordeningen,” *Philosophia Reformata* 57 (1992a):3–38; and Troost, “De tweërlei aard van de wet,” *Philosophia Reformata* 57(1992b):117–31. For the normative practices model, see Henk Jochemsen and Gerrit Glas, *Verantwoord medisch handelen: Proeve van een christelijke medische ethiek* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1997); Jan Hoogland and Henk Jochemsen, “Professional Autonomy and the Normative Structure of Medical Practice,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 21(2000):457–75; and Henk

- Jochemsen, "Normative practices as an intermediate between theoretical ethics and morality," *Philosophia Reformata* 71(2006): 96-112.
33. See, e.g., Willem J. Ouweneel, *De leer van de mens: Proeve van een christelijk-wijsgerige antropologie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1986), who argues for introducing a modality of perception in addition to psychic/sensitive mode of being.
 34. See, e.g., Peter J. Steen, *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge, 1983) and Roy Clouser, "The transcendental critique revisited and revised," *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009):21–47.
 35. For an overview see Atie Th. Brüggeman-Kruijff, "Tijd als omsluiting, tijd als ontsluiting" (I & II), *Philosophia Reformata* 46 (1981):119-63 and 47 (1981):41-68.
 36. Many voices in the circles of Reformational philosophy agree (Danie Strauss, "An analysis of the structure of analysis," *Philosophia Reformata* 49 (1984):35-56; Roy Clouser, "The transcendental critique revisited and revised," *Philosophia Reformata* 74 (2009):21-47. Since the 1970s, many have made the case that the transcendental perspective needs to be transformed into a more open (transcendental) hermeneutical perspective. See, e.g., Henk Geertsema, "Transcendentale openheid: Over het zinkarakter van de werkelijkheid in de wijsbegeerte van H. Dooyeweerd," *Philosophia Reformata* 35 (1970):25-56 and 132-53; Geertsema, "Christian Philosophy: Transformation or inner reformation," *Philosophia Reformata* 52 (1987):139-65; Geertsema, *Het menselijke karakter van ons kennen* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1992); Jan Hoogland, "De uitdrukingskracht van de transcendentale kritiek," *Philosophia Reformata* 59 (1994):114-36; Jacob Klapwijk, "Antithesis, synthesis, and the idea of transformational philosophy," *Philosophia Reformata* 51(1986):138-52; Klapwijk, "Reformational philosophy on the boundary between the past and the future," *Philosophia Reformata* 52 (1987):101-34; Kapwijk, "Epilogue: The idea of transformational philosophy," in *Bringing into Captivity every Thought: Capita selecta in the history of Christian evaluations of non-Christian philosophy*, eds. J. Klapwijk, S. Griffioen, and G. Groenewoud (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 241-66; and Johan van der Hoeven, "Na 50 jaar: *Philosophia Reformata* – *Philosophia Reformanda*," in *Filosofische reflecties en ontmoetingen* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 90-116. Theo De Boer advocates for something similar, particularly in "Hermeneutiek van de transcendentie" and "Transcendentie en transcendentale kritiek" in De Boer, *Langs de gewesten van het zijn: Spiritualiteit van de woestijn* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1996), 156-95 and 236-57.
 37. I think also, e.g., of a thinker like Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [original: *Critique et la conviction*, 1995]), whose hesitancy to highlight the religious moment in his philosophy had to do, he explained, with a French academic context that was in large part dominated by the idea of *laïcité* (secularism of the public sphere) leading to a deep divide between religion and the public sphere, between church and state. (But, here too, there is a difference between explaining and justifying.)
 38. See Glas, "Persons and their Lives: Reformational philosophy on man, ethics, and beyond," *Philosophia Reformata* 71(2006a):31-57.
 39. See also my "The Thinker and the Truth: Kierkegaard and reformational philosophy" (submitted).
 40. Given my background in psychiatry, I will make a point of comparison: the psychotherapist and psychiatrist also take note of how the other responds/reacts to topics raised and then situate these given the professional relation/context in which such topics are being raised. Often the how is more telling than the what in this exchange.
 41. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
 42. Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984):253-71.
 43. See, e.g., Johan Van der Hoeven, "'Het probleem van het kwaad': Vuurproef voor levensechtheid en bescheidenheid van het filosoferen (in de hoofdrol Paul Ricoeur)," in *Peilingen. Korte exploraties in wijsgerig stroomgebied* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1980), 168-93; Henk Geertsema, "Homo respondens: Het antwoord-karakter van het mens-zijn," in *Homo respondens: Verkenningen rond het mens-zijn*, eds. G. Buijs, P. Blokhuis, S. Griffioen, R. Kuiper (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 2005), 25-45.
 44. See Gerrit Glas, *Angst: beleving, structuur, macht* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2001).
 45. This is also the reason that "direction" in the opening-up of creational structures may never simply be equated with this spiritual dimension of reality. Philosophy of a discipline always involves an analysis of a dynamic to which there are always empirical correlates: attitudes, tendencies, disjunctions, integration, etc.
 46. Elsewhere (Glas, "Searching for the dynamic 'with-in,'" In *Hearing Visions and Seeing Voices: Psychological as-*

pects of biblical concepts and personalities, eds. G. Glas et al [Dordrecht: Springer, 2007a], 295-310), I have referred to this as “searching for the dynamic within.”

47. Carl Goldberg, *Speaking with the Devil: A dialogue with evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1996); also Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs, “Four roots of evil,” in *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*, ed. A.G. Miller (New York & London: Guilford Press, 2004), 85-101.
48. Similar analyses are possible when it comes to, say, reconciliation. In setting forth some elements of a phenomenology of evil and reconciliation (Glas, “Elements of a phenomenology of evil and reconciliation,” in *Trauma, Truth, and Reconciliation: Healing damaged relationships*, ed. N. Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006b), 171-202. I try to illustrate that both evidence a mirrored, three-layered structure.
- 49 The author is very grateful to John Kok for his unselfish offer to translate the manuscript and for his meticulous work.

Machen and the Gospel



by John V. Fesko

Introuduction

J. Gresham Machen died on January 1, 1937. Of what relevance—for people who live in the twenty-first century—is anything that Machen said or wrote? Machen never saw the greatest achievements of man, some might contend. The Ford Motor Company stopped manufacturing the Model T just ten years before Machen's death. The fastest airplane could fly at only around three hundred miles per hour. And the computer was not to be developed for some three years. Then, once it was developed, a computer filled a room and did not have even one tenth of the computing power that we now carry in our smart phones. If we move the comparisons between Machen's age

and our own into the theological realm, perhaps the point becomes more apparent. In Machen's day the Dead Sea Scrolls, which have provided historical and theological insights into the period before, during, and after the days of Jesus, had yet to be discovered. The Roman Catholic Church had yet to convene Vatican II, a watershed event in the history of theology. And Machen had only begun to sample the works of one of the twentieth century's best-known theologians, Karl Barth. So if these theological observations are true, of what relevance is Machen to our own understanding and promotion of the gospel of Christ?

To answer this question, I propose to defend the thesis that Machen's battle with liberalism over the gospel of Christ is as relevant now as it was in his own day. We will see that relevance, first, by exploring Machen's original battle with liberalism; second, by exploring Machen's understanding of the gospel and Christianity, a Christian faith that had, at its core, justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; and, third, by connecting Machen's understanding of the gospel and of liberalism to our own context. Far from being irrelevant, Machen's writings struck a bell that has been sounded by faithful theologians throughout the ages—by the apostles, the faithful church fathers, Luther, Calvin, the fathers of Dort, the Westminster divines, Hodge and Warfield at Princeton, and a host of others. By looking at Machen's response to the gospel of liberalism, we can be further equipped to deal with liberalism in our own day and encouraged that we are not alone in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Machen's Original Battle

We can look at Machen's conflict with liberalism, as it pertains to the gospel, from a number of different points. However, a major flashpoint between Machen and liberalism arose over the subject of foreign missions. Famous philanthropist John D. Rockefeller funded a massive study of foreign missions. The compendium of this study, a book titled *Re-Thinking Missions*, edited by Earnest Hocking, concluded that Christianity is, in many ways, the pinnacle of the other religions in the world. In other words, all religions include elements of Christianity. Hocking writes, "In respect to its theology and ethics, Christianity has many doctrines in common with other religions, yet no other religion has the same group of doctrines."¹ Hocking goes on to explain the fundamental nature of Christianity:

It is of the essence of Christianity that its central teachings are simple. It was one aspect of the genius of Jesus that amid a rich store of earlier codes and doctrines he discerned what was essential and brought it to brief and forcible expression. The essence of the law he states in the two great commandments; the essence of right conduct in the Golden Rule; the essence of prayer in the Lord's Prayer; the essence of theology in the picture of God as Father; the essence of the social ideal in the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven among men.²

In this characterization of Christianity, there is no mention of sin or salvation. The absence of these two categories is all the more evident when Hocking gives a description of the aim of Christian missions: "To seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Jesus Christ, and endeavoring to give effect to his spirit in the life of the world."³

Subsequently, Pearl Buck, a well-known novelist and missionary to China, wrote a positive review of Hocking's *Re-Thinking Missions*. Buck was at first suspicious of the report, but after she read it from cover to cover, she changed her mind considerably:

I now confess with enthusiasm and delight that having read it from cover to cover, I put it down with a sense of complete satisfaction. I have not read merely a report. I have read a unique book,

a great book. The book presents a masterly statement of religion in its place in life, and of Christianity in its place of religion. The first three chapters are the finest exposition of religion I have ever read.⁴

Buck heaped praise upon this report, and her views on the way that missionaries should operate sheds light on her view of missions:

Let the spread of the spirit of Christ be rather by mode of life than preaching. I am weary unto death with this incessant preaching. It deadens all thought, it confuses all issues, it is producing in our Chinese church a horde of hypocrites and in our theological seminaries a body of Chinese ministers which makes one despair of the future. Let us cease our talk for a time and cut off our talkers, and try to express our religion in terms of living service, so that we may show others and see for ourselves if our religion is worth anything or not.

It seems that both Hocking and Buck perfectly embody the old cliché of liberalism—deeds, not creeds.

This view is worlds apart from Machen's understanding of Christianity. Machen reacted quite strongly to Hocking's *Re-Thinking Missions* as well as to Buck's positive assessment of it. This reaction eventually led to Machen's formation of the Independent Mission Board, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and, of course, his ignominious defrocking from the mainline Presbyterian church.⁵ As important as these events are, what is of greater interest is Machen's characterization of Christianity and the function of missions. Also of interest is Machen's understanding of preaching, in contrast with Buck's view of deeds instead of creeds.

Unlike the moralist's approach to Christianity, Machen believed that Christianity at its core is doctrinal. Machen asks the question, "Is it true, then, that Christianity is not a doctrine but a life?" Machen then responds, "The Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon a mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon

doctrine.”⁶ And for Machen, one doctrine is the touchstone for the Christian faith: “At the center of Christianity is the doctrine of ‘justification by faith.’”⁷ Machen believed that the rediscovery of the doctrine of justification by faith brought with it the whole of our evangelical freedom. Machen writes, “As expounded by Luther and Calvin the Epistle of Galatians became the ‘Magna Charta of Christian liberty.’”⁸ Moreover, Machen argues, “What then was the message of Luther which set the world aflame? It was not something that Luther originated but something that he discovered; the Reformation of the sixteenth century was a rediscovery of Paul, and through Paul a rediscovery of Jesus.”⁹

Justification by Faith Alone and the Gospel

This question naturally arises: Why did Machen believe that justification was at the center of Christianity? In a word, the doctrine of justification is the nexus of a number of doctrines, as it embodies, in Christ, God’s grace given to sinful man to bring about his salvation. Machen embraced the teaching of the Scriptures, the Reformation, and the Westminster Standards, namely, that man was created upright and given a command not to eat from the tree of knowledge. However, Adam did not stand alone; his actions were not his alone, for in the language of older theology, Adam was a public person (*Larger Catechism*, question 22; cf. q. 52). What Adam did, whether he obeyed or disobeyed, would be imputed to his wife and his offspring. Paul makes this point abundantly clear in Romans 5:12 (ESV): “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, . . . so death spread to all men because all sinned.” The idea of representative obedience and disobedience appears throughout the Scriptures. Think, for example, of David’s sinful military census. The Lord specifically prohibited Israel from numbering their army because he always wanted his people to know that their strength came from him, not their great numbers (2 Sam. 24:1-10; 1 Chr. 21:1-4). Still, David commanded Joab to take a census, and though it was David’s action alone, the people suffered for his action; seventy thousand men died from a pestilence (1 Sam. 24:15). The many suffered because of the actions of one. On the other

hand, righteous Noah was obedient to the command of the Lord to build an ark, and as a result Noah’s household was saved from the flood (Gen. 6-8). The many benefitted from the actions of one. In a word, Adam was our federal representative and plunged the whole human race into the pit of original sin.

Machen was aware of the different ways by which ancient and modern humanity proposed to extricate themselves from the pit of sin and death. Machen rejected mysticism as an approach to God and redemption because mystics believe that communion with God is based in “ineffable experience,” whereas the Bible teaches that a premium is placed upon understanding and knowing the truth.¹⁰ Machen also rejected pantheism because while it makes God near to man by making God everything, it makes God remote by making God a “blind vital force,” destroying the personality of God and thereby making impossible any fellowship with him, let alone deliverance from the guilt and shame of sin and death.¹¹ If pantheism and mysticism are closed roads, then surely man might extricate himself through his own good works—his own show of morality. While on a human level, doing good is certainly better than doing evil, Machen wanted to know the root cause and motivating factor behind such morality.

Machen understood that in the United States, morality is often an exponent of patriotism. In other words, our government inculcates the nation in a corporate morality: “We must do what is right because Uncle Sam thinks so.” Another version of this might be, “Don’t lie because it’s not the American way.” Such expressions of morality are ultimately driven by a love for country, observed Machen. Writing in the wake of World War I, a war attributed, rightly or wrongly, to the nationalism of Germany, Machen asked the insightful question as to whether such a patriotic morality was any different than the morality of Prussia. In other words, to teach a nation to follow the moral code of the country, a code that all other nations must follow, is the same spirit that drove Germany and Prussia to engage in a bloody and costly war.¹²

If patriotic morality is not the answer, then surely a biblical morality is the cure for the guilt and shame of sin, right? Machen was aware of Paul’s

teaching in Romans 2: “Even the Gentiles, though they do not know that clear manifestation of God’s law which was found in the Old Testament, have God’s law written upon their hearts and are without excuse when they disobey.”¹³ Could not the moral law written upon man’s heart as well as upon the two tablets of stone on Sinai give man the moral ladder by which to ascend from the pit of sin

Machen knew that the law is powerless to save; the law only has the power to condemn.

and death and rise to heaven? The simple answer is “no.” In Machen’s lecture notes on Galatians, he observes, “The law made the commands of God so terribly clear that Paul could see plainly that there was no hope for him if he appealed for his salvation to his own obedience to those commands.”¹⁴ The law, as the Scriptures clearly show, only brings condemnation. Machen knew that the law is powerless to save; the law only has the power to condemn.

Certainly, then, a person must believe in God, but should he also not contribute to his salvation in some way? Machen identified this combination of faith and works as a false gospel. In his lecture notes on Galatians, Machen writes, “The enemy against which Paul is fighting in the Epistle can be reconstructed fairly well from the Epistle itself. Paul was fighting against the doctrine that a man can earn a part, at least, of his salvation by his own obedience to God’s law; he was fighting against the doctrine that a man is justified not by faith alone, but by faith *and* works.”¹⁵ Machen knew that Paul’s opponents, the Judaizers, though an ancient foe of the gospel, had descendants in his own day:

So the error of the Judaizers is a very modern error indeed, as well as a very ancient error. It is found in the modern Church wherever men seek salvation by “surrender” instead of by faith, or by their own character instead of by the imputed righteousness of Christ, or by “making Christ master in the life” instead of by trusting in His redeeming blood. In

particular, it is found wherever men say that “the real essentials” of Christianity are love, justice, mercy and other virtues, as contrasted with the great doctrines of God’s Word. These are all just different ways of exalting the merit of man over against the Cross of Christ; they are all of them attacks upon the very heart and core of the Christian religion.¹⁶

Machen rejected all other approaches to salvation—mysticism, pantheism, moralism, and legalism—and recognized that there was only one way to be saved—by faith alone, in the person and work of Christ alone, by God’s grace alone. Why did Machen believe that faith in Christ was the only way to salvation?

The answer—to why Machen believed in Christ as the only way to salvation—is found in what the Scriptures teach regarding Adam as our federal representative: “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be constituted righteous” (Rom 5.18-19).¹⁷ Christ is the only one who can save us from the sin of Adam as well as our own personal sins. As Paul writes here in Romans 5, we were constituted, or placed in the category of, sinners by the active disobedience of Adam, and by way of a breathtaking glorious contrast, we are placed in the category of righteous because of the obedience of Jesus Christ. There is a twofold way in which the obedience of Christ saves us and places us in the category of righteous.

First, note what Paul writes concerning the curse that hangs over the head of all people: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’” (Gal. 3.10, ESV). It is for this very reason, the curse of the law that hangs upon all people, that Christ came and “was born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4.4b-5a, ESV). Machen explains this point in his lectures on Galatians:

Christ died that death, which the law fixes as the penalty of sin, when He died upon the cross; and

since He died that death as our representative, we too have died that death; the penalty of the law is for us done away because that penalty has been paid in our stead by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus our death to the law, suffered for us by Christ, far from being contrary to the law, was in fulfillment of the law's own demands. We are free from the penalty of death pronounced by the law upon sin not because we are rebels against the law, but because the penalty has been paid by Christ.¹⁸

Christ has freed us from the penalty of the law and has borne it on our behalf. He suffered for us so that we would not have to suffer.

But second, Christ's work for us does not consist merely in his suffering, as important as this is. Machen makes an important observation when he writes, "I think we can say—if indeed it is legitimate to separate one part of the work of Christ even in thought from the rest—that if Christ had merely paid the penalty of sin for us and had done nothing more we should be at best back in the situation in which Adam found himself when God placed him under the covenant of works."¹⁹ This is what so many in Machen's day, as well as in our own, believe: that Christ merely puts us back in the garden; and left on our own through our own obedience, we must secure our own redemption. But Paul writes, "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21, ESV). Christ's representative obedience does not merely free us from the penalty against sin but also indefectibly secures our righteous status; Christ secures our redemption, our eternal life.

Machen was well aware of this truth and rejoiced as he looked by faith to Christ because he knew that Christ, the last Adam, had come and succeeded where the first Adam had failed. Machen reveled in the utter simplicity of the gospel: "Such, put in bald, simple form, is the dialogue between every Christian and the law of God. How gloriously complete is the salvation wrought for us by Christ! Christ paid the penalty, and He merited the reward. Those are the two great things that He has done for us."²⁰ But Machen is careful to stipulate

the unified nature of Christ's obedience on our behalf. Machen rejects the common medieval notion that Christ's passive obedience was only his suffering on the cross and that his active obedience was only his law keeping. Rather, Machen explains,

During every moment of His life upon earth Christ was engaged in His passive obedience. It was all for Him humiliation, was it not? It was all suffering. It was all part of His payment of the penalty of sin. On the other hand, we cannot say that His death was passive obedience and not active obedience. On the contrary, His death was the crown of His active obedience. It was the crown of that obedience to the law of God by which He merited eternal life for those whom He came to save.²¹

The towering figure of Christ stands above all of the claims and efforts of man to extricate himself from the pit of sin and death. Only Christ's representative work can undo the representative disobedience of Adam.

Christ is the reason that Machen opposed all other approaches to God—pantheism, mysticism, moralism, and legalism. Machen observes that the Bible involves three great acts of imputation: first, the sins of Adam are imputed to his descendants; second, the sins of Christ's people are imputed to Jesus; and third, Christ's obedience is imputed to save his people.²² Because of Christ's work on our behalf, Machen recognizes that we must believe and trust in what Christ has done on our behalf and not trust in what we ourselves can try to do to save ourselves. Machen highlights this difference between man-centered and Christ-centered approaches to salvation in his exegesis of Paul's quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:11-12: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'" (ESV). Machen explains that what Paul describes here is the nature of the law: "It requires *doing* something." But by way of contrast, "faith is the opposite of doing." According to Machen, to be justified by faith means that a person has not *done* anything. Machen writes,

There are two conceivable ways of salvation. One way is to keep the law perfectly, to *do* the things

which the law requires. No mere man since the fall has accomplished that. The other way is to *receive* something, to receive something that is freely given by God's grace. That way is followed when a man has faith. But you cannot possibly mingle the two. You might conceivably be saved by works or you might be saved by faith; but you cannot be saved by both. It is "either or" here not "both and." But which shall it be, works or faith? The Scripture gives the answer. The Scripture says it is faith. Therefore it is *not* works.²³

Hence, it is Scripture that drives Machen to say, and rightly so, that salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone.

Machen highlights the Bible's emphasis on faith versus works, or believing versus doing, in his analysis of Jesus and the Roman centurion (Luke 7.2-10; Matt. 8.5-13). The centurion came to Jesus on behalf of his servant who was on his deathbed. The centurion said that he was unworthy to have such an honored guest—Jesus—under his roof and that Jesus need only say the word and he—the centurion—knew his servant would be healed. Machen observes, "The point of the narrative is not that he did anything, but rather that he did nothing; he simply believed that Jesus could do something, and accepted that thing at Jesus' hands; he simply believed that Jesus could work the stupendous miracle of healing at a distance." Machen continues: "In other words, the centurion is presented as one who had faith; and faith, as distinguished from the effects of faith, consists not in doing something but in receiving something. Faith may result in action, and certainly true faith in Jesus always will result in action; but faith itself is not doing but receiving."²⁴

If we have not yet noticed, this underlying theology, namely the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has justification at its center, carries massive implications for preaching. Foremost is the difference between the preaching of liberalism and the preaching of orthodox biblical Christianity. In his watershed book *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen differentiated between liberalism and Christianity: the preaching of liberalism begins and ends in the imperative mood. Liberalism appeals to man's will and tells him what he must do in order to be saved. Christianity, on the other hand, begins with a trium-

phant indicative—Christianity heralds the gracious act of God on man's behalf. In orthodox biblical preaching, the message is founded upon the indicative of what Christ has done for us.²⁵

Machen further highlights the differences between Christianity and liberalism by comparing Christian preaching to the ancient peripatetic philosophers. Machen notes that the Cynic and Stoic philosophers ambulated about, preaching to people on how they should live. Christianity took an entirely different approach in that the apostles did not appeal to man's will but instead told a story: "Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called the foolishness of the message."²⁶

If we stop to think about it for a moment, if we believe that preaching is supposed to beget a man-centered effort at imitating Jesus, then we must admit with Machen, "As a mere ideal, Jesus is a failure."²⁷ Rather, Machen believed that a person must be grasped by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that this occurs through the preaching of

*Christ is the reason that
Machen opposed all other
approaches to God—
pantheism, mysticism,
moralism, and legalism.*

the gospel of Christ.²⁸ Once a person is redeemed, then, and only then, does Jesus' life serve in an exemplary manner: "The example of Jesus is useful to the Christian not prior to redemption, but subsequent to it."²⁹ This is the difference between the preaching of liberalism and the preaching of Christianity—the difference between the bald imperative and the triumphant indicative that is followed by the imperative. Machen understood that "liberalism finds salvation . . . in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God." Machen clarifies this difference when he explains, "He is our Savior, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself

the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross. Such is the Christian conception of the Cross of Christ."³⁰

The Perennial Relevance of Machen's Battle and the Gospel

The question that stands before us now is this: Have we a need for Machen's militant stance vis-à-vis liberalism? There are certainly those in the broader church who believe that Machen and his ways are and should be a thing of the past. In his latest book, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox tries to make the case that the church has moved beyond the need for creeds and confessions, a period marked by the likes of Machen and fundamentalism.³¹ Cox argues that in the days of Jesus, the church knew nothing of lines of division, lines that separated orthodoxy from heresy. Cox contends that the early church did not know of one Christian faith but of multiple Christian faiths—those that emphasized the historical Jesus, others the universal Christ, and still others the mystical inner Christ.³² According to Cox, therefore, the gospel of Thomas should not be excluded from the Bible, as who is to decide whether it is orthodox or heretical.³³ Hence, Cox believes that the church is now moving into the "Age of the Spirit," where the truth of Christianity is not contained in a creed but is instead something to be embodied.³⁴ Cox also resonates with the sentiments of well-known evangelical pastor Rick Warren, who argues that the church now needs a second Reformation, one based on deeds, not creeds. Similar to Warren, Cox happily reports that poetry, drama, and dance are finding their way back into sanctuaries across the country.³⁵

At this point one cannot help but invoke the old cliché—the more things change, the more they stay the same. Cox's book is heralded as prophetic and timely, and Cox himself is called "a groundbreaking theologian."³⁶ Yet how are his views different from the views espoused in Rockefeller's *Re-Thinking Missions* or by Pearl Buck's positive assessment of the same? Echoing the sentiments found in *Re-Thinking Missions*, Cox writes of his discovery of the appreciation of Jesus in the other religions of the world, from his contact with persons of other faiths in a course he taught on the subject of Jesus:

I quickly learned that Christianity has no monopoly on Jesus. Hindus understood him as an avatar, Buddhists as a bodhisattva, and both Muslims and Jews as a prophet of God. Even agnostics found something fascinating and admirable in him. They were not all that attracted to Christianity, but they were all drawn to Jesus for his exemplary courage, his compassion for the disinherited, and his willingness to stand up to corrupt political and religious authorities.³⁷

To be frank, this is an expression of classical liberalism—of the very sort that Machen so vigorously opposed. Additionally, such an assessment flies in the face of Jesus' own words. As C. S. Lewis has observed, Jesus does not present himself as a mere man, or a good teacher, but as God in the flesh. We are thereby faced with a trilemma: he is either a liar on the level of demon, or a lunatic on the level of a person who thinks himself to be a poached egg, or Lord. And if he is Lord, we have the moral obligation to fall on our faces and worship him as such.³⁸ Machen's stand against liberalism must be our stand against the same, and we must fight the battle with the same weapons: the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Cox's praise of the embodiment of faith over and against creeds, and his celebration of the inclusion of poetry, drama, and dance in worship, also echoes Buck's desire to see preaching eliminated. The more we entertain, the less room we find for preaching the gospel of the risen and ascended Messiah. People begin to look for entertainment and unwittingly buy into the world's assessment of preaching—that it is a foolish way to spread the gospel of Christ. One need not go far into the church to find sheer entertainment masquerading as worship.

Even within the Reformed community, there are signs of compromise. I was once asked to baptize a child at a conservative Reformed church but was told that the month of December would not be a possible time because of scheduled choir numbers and special music pieces. While choirs and special music are certainly debatable matters, the more fundamental issue is that the visible preaching of the gospel of Christ in the sacrament of baptism, a rite ordained and instituted by Christ

himself, was being pushed aside by music. Evening worship among Reformed churches is also in decline. How can the dying hear the message of the gospel when churches close their doors and do not strike the rock in the wilderness to bring forth the living water of life?

Machen alerts us to another problem that appeared in his own day and continues to affect churches today, even within Reformed circles. Machen laments that when people come to the church, they only find the turmoil of the world. Machen writes, "The preacher comes forward not out of a secret place of meditation and power, not with the authority of God's Word permeating his message, not with human wisdom pushed far into the background by the glory of the Cross, but with human opinions about the social problems of the hour or easy solutions of the vast problem of sin. Such is the sermon." Machen laments,

We must continue to stand with Machen and demand and expect that our ministers will herald the gospel of Christ and accept no substitutes.

Is there no refuge from strife? Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there be such a place, then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.³⁹

Sadly, Machen's characterization of pulpits in his day is still relevant. Once, when one of my el-

ders on session came back from a vacation where he and his wife attended a conservative Reformed congregation for worship, they reported that the pastor sounded more like an angry man railing against societal ills than a minister bringing the balm of the gospel to the people of God. We must continue to stand with Machen and demand and expect that our ministers will herald the gospel of Christ and accept no substitutes.

However, another alarming trend is growing within the broader church, even within the walls of evangelicalism. Well-known evangelical historian Mark Noll recently wrote a book titled *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. Bottom line, Noll's answer to this question is "yes"—The Reformation is over. Noll's basic argument is that in the wake of Vatican II and the publication of the Roman Catholic Church's *Catechism*, Rome's position on justification "now seems to fall somewhere between John Wesley's Arminianism and the Augustinian positions maintained by Martin Luther and John Calvin." Noll explains,

Thus, on the substance of what is actually taught about God's saving work in the world, if not always on the exact terminology used to describe that saving work, many evangelicals and Catholics believe something close to the same thing. If it is true, as once was repeated frequently by Protestants conscious of their anchorage in Martin Luther or John Calvin that *iustificatio articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* (justification is the article on which the church stands or falls), then the Reformation is over.⁴⁰

In one sense, Noll's comments represent a great change since the days of Machen, but it is not a change for the better.

In Machen's day, he could count on fellow so-called evangelicals to stand shoulder to shoulder with him against the Roman Catholic Church. But now, Noll's book represents pressure from within evangelicalism to compromise with Rome because there is no great perceived difference between the two camps. The problem is that Noll's analysis is false. In fact, the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has become far worse than anything that the Council of Trent ever said on salvation and the doctrine of justification. Aside from

the fact that the *Catholic Catechism* continues to endorse the proclamations of Trent, Vatican II goes on to promote the doctrine of the “anonymous Christian.” *Lumen Gentium*, a proclamation of Vatican II, states,

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—these too may attain eternal salvation. Nor will divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever of good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all men and women that they have at length have life.⁴¹

It is difficult to characterize this statement as anything but salvation by good works. Rome once had semi-Pelagius upon its throne, but he has now abdicated his place of honor to his father, Pelagius. Rome does not stop here but also states, “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day.”⁴²

It is a sad testimony of the devolution of theology when we have to defend the claim among professing Christians that the faith of Abraham is not the faith of Islam and that Yahweh, the one true living God, is not Allah. Jesus tells us in the Word that Abraham longed and looked forward to his advent—Abraham longed for the advent of the Messiah (John 8.56). In other words, Abraham looked to Christ by faith alone, and though he was an ungodly man, he was justified—declared righteous in the sight of God (Rom 4.1-3). The faith of Abraham and Islam hold nothing in common. Noll’s call for the end of the Reformation reveals at least two things: (1) that he is unfamiliar with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and (2) that so-called Protestants no longer understand their own faith—they are no longer familiar with

the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sentiments like Noll’s clearly demonstrate the perennial relevance of Machen’s call to stand firm on the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot and must not surrender to the cries for peace when in truth there is no peace.

Conclusion

Let us hope that in light of the present challenges to the gospel, whether from the broader church or even within our own circle, we see the benefit of Machen’s stand for the truth. When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no compromise. We must pray that our faithful Lord would grant us the spirit of humility and love to spread the gospel far and wide so that the lost and dying of the world are delivered from the lies and half-truths of false gospels. At the same time, we must pray that Christ would pour steel into our spines so that we boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ—that God came in the flesh to save fallen humanity from sin and death by standing in our place, not only to pay the penalty for our corporate and individual transgression of God’s law but also to fulfill the law on our behalf; moreover, that the way of salvation is not by doing or looking within but by faith alone, by believing in Christ alone. We must pray that God would continue to send faithful ministers to herald the wonderful gospel of Christ and that our Lord, through Word and sacrament, would continue to gather a bride for himself.

Endnotes

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Saints in Training: The Career of a Dordt College Grad



by Hubert R. Krygsman

Chairman Kroll, President Zylstra, esteemed colleagues, honoured friends and family, and dear graduates of the class of 2011. First of all, I bring you greetings from Redeemer University College. There are many connections between Redeemer, including our common purpose of post-secondary education from a Reformed Christian perspective, and we wish you God's richest blessings as you serve Him here at Dordt College. On a more personal note, let me also say how honoured and delighted I am to share this happy occasion with you. Nancy and I spent 20 years here, and all

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of our children and their spouses are Dordt alumni, so coming back to Dordt is the next-best thing to a homecoming for us. To my colleagues here on the stage and front benches, I remain deeply grateful for the "camaraderie" and for all that I have learned from you over the years. I also know well how you, and the Dordt College staff, have given yourself to your students to prepare them for this day. I think I can speak for the Class of 2011 in thanking you for your work. Finally, to the class of 2011, I want to say "congratulations." I've had the privilege of teaching many of you during your first years at Dordt. And—not that I had any doubts that you would make it—it is a great encouragement to see you here today, ready to graduate from Dordt College.

So what does this Commencement Day rite of passage—your fulfillment of the requirements of a Dordt College degree—mean to you? How will you use this degree? What will be the "career"—and by this I mean not only your job but also your life and the entire future of all that has gone into your college education and formation?

Today you join more than two million mostly young adults who are graduating from American colleges and universities this spring. Judging by the many brochures and advertisements that cross my desk about how to recruit students or how to lobby for government support, one might say that the main expectation and goal of a post-secondary degree in North America is to obtain a high-paying job and, for a few, perhaps to develop new products that will solve our health and environmental problems and restore our economic fortunes. In other words, many see post-secondary education as part

of the great myth of progress,¹ a narrative in which individuals seek liberation from all that corrupts us or weighs us down—like poverty, traditions, and stifling communities—so that we can achieve self-realization and self-satisfaction, especially in material terms. Commencement in these terms is a kind of modern escape from the burdens of civilization into the wilderness, a leave-taking, after due preparation, to seek your fame and fortune in new lands of opportunity. Perhaps some of you, too, are planning to head out for the big city lights to make your fame and fortune.

If this is your story for the meaning of commencement, then I worry for you. I'm sure that you already know the litany of economic, political, and environmental challenges that the Boomer generation, what in my time was called the "me" generation, has left you. These are massive challenges from which there is no escape, and that fleeting moments like the death of Osama bin Laden or the distraction of the fairy-tale wedding of Will and Kate will not resolve.

But besides these large-scale structural problems in our society, I am perhaps even more concerned that the largely bankrupt culture of the "me" generation has also wormed its way deep into the psyches and habits of *your* generation. It often is said that today's youth are idealistic and want to make a difference for good in the world, yet they feel deeply frustrated and alienated from established institutions. As Robert Putnam shows in *Bowling Alone*, and as I know from my own work, young adults are not "joiners" or "signer-uppers"; they are wary of traditional institutions and reluctant to commit to organizations and long-term relationships or habits, leaving a host of social institutions floundering. This is true even of Christian young adults, who seem no less ready to abandon church communities, schools, marriages, and other relational commitments. Young adults seem to prefer the informal, undemanding, and transient relationships of the new social media—though ironically these relationships have left young adults with such deep loneliness and social anxiety that universities and colleges are warning of a mental health crisis among their students. And a recent study of popular music by psychologist Nathan de Wall shows that song lyrics of this past decade show even more frequent

use of the words "I" and "me"—and expressions of both vanity and anger—than the romantic lyrics of the Boomer generation.² Bowling alone, it seems, is not all it's cracked up to be. Nor is it adequate to the larger challenges that are before us. That's why, if the career of your Dordt College education is escape, I worry for you, and for the larger world.

But here's the good news: I know that your Dordt College education has trained you for and inducted you into a story radically different from that of progress and escape. From the time of your first-term seminar, "Kingdom, Identity, and Calling," you have learned that your calling is first of all to discipleship, to being grafted and refashioned into the image of Christ and living inside the story of God's kingdom.

The story of this kingdom—what Hebrews calls the heavenly city, or what Augustine termed the City of God, or what John Winthrop called the City on a Hill—stands in sharp contrast to the modern story of progress and escape. It does not seek escape from the world with its poverty, violence, and suffering; for these, as Jesus said, you will always have with you as an opportunity for Christ-like witness and healing! This heavenly city is a place of peace, justice, and shalom, where all creatures can flourish, and which is bound together by the love of its citizens for God and for the world.

Your education at Dordt has been a training for becoming these citizens, that is, for becoming living saints who are Christ-like, self-sacrificing servant-leaders for God's kingdom in the world around you. Like the young runner described in Hebrews 12, you have been disciplined to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12.1-2, NIV). That discipline has included stretching your biblically-guided insight; exercising your critical and analytical reasoning, your imagination, and your communication and voice; exploring and deepening your faith; and cultivating your mature personality and social relationships. Through these exercises you have learned to understand both your major and all of life in the light of this transformative story. You know whose we are and whom we are called

to serve, you have learned how God has structured creation and calls us to live obediently according to his laws and norms, you have studied how the world has come to be as it is today, broken with the impact of sin and yet being made new in Christ and his redemptive kingdom, and you have been challenged to discover how we are called to live today as his kingdom citizens. In short, you have been trained into a Reformed perspective in a rich, intense, discipling community that has encouraged you to grow in wisdom and in all your gifts—an education that I hope you will continue to hold, practice, and grow in throughout your life-long race.

So let me put to you the challenge that Steven Garber gave to Redeemer students this past winter: have you, in coming to understand life within the story of God's kingdom, also developed the *heart* of a saint—a heart that will enable you to persevere in loving a world that is between-the-times, broken and imperfect, as God did in Christ, and one that will sustain your longing for and service to God's kingdom and community through good times and bad?

Now you might ask, what's love got to do with your achievement of a university degree? I expect you already know the answer. In the biblical model of wisdom, "knowledge" in its deepest sense means an intimate understanding and loving of others, and a desire to establish right relations with those others.³ As Jesus declared, if you know me, you will love me and follow me (see John 14). Likewise, the Psalms, especially Psalm 119, repeatedly connect loving God with knowing and delighting in his law and acting according to it in doing justice and helping the poor, the orphaned, and the widowed (see also Isaiah 11). In other words, your knowledge needs to be rooted in the love of God and bear fruit in your love and service to your neighbours, your communities, and to all creation.

Remember also that the heavenly city is communal and therefore relational. Sustaining these relations requires more than an occasional You-tube "mob" event. As Andy Crouch writes, we are called as God's image-bearers and shapers of creation to weave God's Word of love into enduring habits, relationships, liturgies, and other cultural forms and institutions so that we embody and enable God's purpose and grace for the creation.⁴ Such forms

and institutions will remain imperfect and in need of continuing transformation, but we must have them in order to fulfill our human nature and calling.

To sustain such habits and institutions, you will need to get involved and make long-term commitments. You will need to reach out to and share with your neighbours; you will need to build caring workplaces that strive for good stewardship of God's creation; you will need to be active contributors to your church congregations, local school boards, and local civic and political organizations; and so on. As Paul instructed the young Timothy, you should be bold and ready to serve, taking every opportunity to witness to and build toward the flourishing of God's kingdom in your work, families, churches, public life, and every other corner of God's creation.

Doing so, especially in a broken world, and with huge challenges and imperfect people, takes sustained hard work and the heart of a saint. Precisely! Don't expect the world to be perfect before you engage it—it is for Christ's sake, and in the strength of His kingdom, that we are called to persevere in loving and serving others and striving toward God's kingdom of righteousness.

Finally, let me add this: God's kingdom, and the community of saints, *needs* you. Take a look around you—your parents and grand-parents, your professors, even President Zylstra—we're all part of the Boomer generation that is ready to step down or retire. I myself became a first-time grand-parent only a month ago, an event that has given me a new sense of urgency about sustaining a vibrant, culturally-transforming Christian community for the next generation. At every turn, in all sectors of life and all around the world, there is growing need of a new generation of willing Christian servants and leaders. And as Rob Briner puts it, in his passionate appeal for holistic Christian higher education, Christians urgently need to be engaged in the leading sectors of our culture, like mass media and new media, the arts, business, and public policy, in order to be a transforming influence in today's culture.⁵ This is your calling—not to escape, not even merely to occasionally participate, but to be fully engaged in the challenges, discourse, and institutions of our time, loving and serving the Lord with all your heart,

soul, and mind.

If you can't quite see yourself in this, or if the race seems too daunting with too many obstacles, remember that you do not face this calling alone. Let me give you a personal example. When I began my current position, three good colleagues remind-

At every turn, in all sectors of life and all around the world, there is growing need for a new generation of willing Christian servants and leaders.

ed me of those passages at the end of Exodus and beginning of Deuteronomy where the aging Moses commissions the younger Joshua to lead God's people into the promised land with the words "be courageous, for the Lord our God is with you." It was a beautiful and welcome reminder, but I had no idea what it would come to mean for today. Its significance became clearer this past year as we at Redeemer faced a difficult challenge from the 65,000-member-strong Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which purports to represent professors from public universities in Canada. After supposedly investigating Christian universities like Redeemer, the CAUT claimed that because they require a faith a commitment on the part of their faculty-members, Christian universities infringe upon academic freedom and, therefore, are of questionable status as universities. As you might imagine, we considered this a threatening attack from a militantly secular organization that could seriously injure the cause of Redeemer and Christian higher education in Canada.

My colleagues and I thought long and hard about strategies for defending ourselves and managing publicity. But in the end, we concluded that the only real and truthful option was to follow Martin Luther's "here I stand, so help me God" witness:

we affirmed that we are indeed a Christian university, we do hire Christian faculty, that in the context of our Christian university we have opportunity for both faithfulness and freedom to seek insight into all of reality in the light of God's Word, and that this educational vision is a long-established public good for which there must be room in Canada.

When the CAUT's investigation of Redeemer hit the media, we expected a rough ride, but to our wonder, and to no credit for our own efforts, people from many different corners of the country spoke up in support of us—including Christians from all different denominations, academics and politicians across the country, and even the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. We were amazed and humbled to be reminded how the living God, who can raise people from the dead, continues to work in powerful ways in the world around us.

It is our task simply to walk faithfully with God, exercising and using all the gifts he has given us and confident that he will bring all things into his kingdom. As you do this, remember at least these two sure realities. First, remember God's commitment to his people Israel through the prophet Isaiah to keep his promise of redemption through all the obstacles they might encounter (Isaiah 43, NIV):

- 1 But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are
mine.
- 2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
- 3 For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;....
- 5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

And second, remember also that one of the ways God works is through the encouragement and support of the community of saints of all ages. That passage in Hebrews 12 about how you are being trained to run the race, to live as saints begins with

this: “*Since* you are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses....” That cloud is recited in Hebrews 11, going all the way back to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, and on, and on. All of these lived and walked with God in faith and stretched toward that heavenly city, which God has been preparing through His redemptive kingdom. We could add to this list the apostles, the church fathers, the Reformers, and many others, including *this* crowd of saints gathered here today. All of these were instrumental in living out God’s kingdom and in preparing you for this day. And now they are cheering you on as you take up the baton and run your leg of the race in shaping the future toward God’s kingdom.

As you go on from here, may the Lord go with you; may He fill you with the love, wisdom, grace, and power of His Spirit; and may He use you, in-

cluding the career of your Dordt education, mightily for building up His body and for the coming of His kingdom.

Endnotes

- 1 Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), chs. 2-3.
- 2 John Tierney, “A Generation’s Vanity, Heard Through Lyrics,” *New York Times*, April 26, 2011.
- 3 Harry Fernhout, “Serviceable Insight: Wisdom at Work,” in *Marginal Resistance: Essays Dedicated to John C. Vander Stelt* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt Press, 2001), 7-8, 17-18.
- 4 Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008).
- 5 Bob Briner, *Roaring Lambs: a gentle plan to radically change your world* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

Paul Simon's *Memento Mori*: A Review Essay



by James C. Schaap

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And thou most kind and gentle Death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou ledest home the child of God,
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod.

I didn't really need to sing stanza six of "All Creatures of our God and King," a completely unfamiliar verse of an otherwise familiar hymn. It came after the sermon and just before the final blessing one May Sunday at the English Reformed Church of Amsterdam, where we worshipped—*we* being the 2011 Dordt College Alumni and Friends Netherlands Tour group. I didn't need to sing that peculiar stanza because the tour had already taken us places where the idea of *memento mori* (a Latin phrase suggesting "remember your mortality") was in stark evidence.

Besides, upon the podcast recommendation of a friend, I'd been reading Rob Moll's new book, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*, to return to what once was a principled exercise Moll says is completely forgotten, in part, because today death is antiseptically cordoned off from day-to-day experience. Not so formerly, he argues.

Death could never be more frequent, given the rise in world populations; but it could be, and likely was, more familiar years ago, when people died younger, childbirth was vastly more dangerous, and—in many places—hospitals were few and far between, hospice-care unknown. Forty years ago already in her much-read study, *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross maintained that, as a

culture, we'd distanced ourselves unhealthily from the experience of death.

Rob Moll's book restates what Kubler-Ross found in the late '60s: the distance we put between death and ourselves is soulfully detrimental. Moll is a believer—and his book is written primarily for Christians. Kubler-Ross was the child of Swiss Protestants, but by the end of her remarkable life she seemed, to some at least, to be more of a spiritualist than a believer in Jesus Christ.

What both clearly demonstrate, however, is the distance our medical competence has been able to engineer between ourselves and dying, a fact which any visit to one's European roots makes vividly clear. Once upon a time, death was immensely more familiar.

Wherever one goes in Holland, one sees ample evidences of the theme or idea of *memento mori*. Every old cathedral is festooned lavishly with skulls and crossbones. Centuries ago, a church's high-and-mighty were buried in the floor, beneath the aisles of spacious sanctuaries. No one going to worship could miss the memorials beneath their feet.



Even though “All Creatures of our God and King” was composed by St. Francis of Assisi already in the thirteenth century, and even though today it is very familiar, the famous hymn didn't find its way into the CRC's own *Psalter Hymnal* until the 1987 edition.

I'd never heard that verse before. It is yet another example of *memento mori*. To St. Francis, death is “kind and gentle.” For decades I've taught Emily

Dickinson's most famous poem, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” as some kind of anomaly because Mr. Death, in that poem, is not some ghoulish monster but a kindly gentleman caller. Dickinson, I've told students, was an original. I may have to edit that assessment out of future lectures; Ms. Emily may simply have picked up the idea from New England hymnody.

Why the very famous hymn “All Creatures of Our God and King” didn't make it into the *Psalter Hymnal* until recently may be an easier question to answer than why the version we do sing does not include the verse that rang out a few weeks ago in Amsterdam's English church. Here are the lyrics again:

And thou most kind and gentle Death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod.

Perhaps—just perhaps—one doesn't find that stanza even in the gray *Psalter Hymnal* because it was considered too morbid or mawkish for congregational singing.

Rob Moll quotes C. Ben Mitchell, a former professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and head of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, Union University: “You have to work hard to avoid discussions of dying in the church,” Mitchell says. “Yet that's exactly what we've done. We have avoided it with all of our might.”

Moll claims, ironically, that evangelical Christians are among the most dedicated to refusing to accept the reality or the moral power of death and dying: “Unfortunately, many Christians insist as a matter of faith and in order to be consistently pro-life that all deaths should come only after deploying an arsenal of medical treatment,” he writes. “To many believers, it seems paradoxical that one could at once be pro-life and embrace death as it approaches.”

But then, simply getting old makes denying death's reality difficult, if not impossible. In the last decade I've spent countless hours in the often silent hallways of places designed for “leisure living,” in homes for the aged, where I've watched parents tangle pathetically with malfunctioning

bodies. I've learned to turn up the volume in my speech and to don short sleeves when making even mid-January visits. I've learned what can and can't be said to my own parents, what will and will not get through. "Getting old isn't easy," my 92-year-old father-in-law has said to me frequently, and he should know—he and his baby brother are the only siblings, of ten, who haven't been victims of Alzheimer's.

That's why I say I didn't need an old hymn's strange stanza or cathedral icons to remind me of my mortality. I know it in my bones after mowing the lawn and staining the deck. I know it every time I climb the stairs or get out of a straight chair. At 63 years old, despite all the trips to the gym, I'm not getting any stronger.

The processes of aging may be why I was drawn to Paul Simon's new collection, *So Beautiful or So What*, when I read a review. Simon and his sidekick Art Garfunkel have been part of my life since I was a teenager. Once upon a time I had every last



album; I still have several. Even though my musical tastes have drifted elsewhere, Paul Simon's own eclectic folk rock is almost always beside me here in my study. It plays on our iPod sound system on some Saturday afternoons, and when I walk or bike and I need inspiration to get through the workout, I choose Paul Simon.

So Beautiful or So What, Simon claims, offers a skein of new songs meant to fit together thematically like *Winesburg, Ohio*, a collection of related short stories, or an old Beatles album—say, *Abbey Road* or *Sgt. Pepper*. He claims he wanted *So Beautiful or So What* to be itself a work of art. And it is—it's Paul Simon's very own *memento mori*. He is, after all, 70 years old, and it may be only natural that he is,

for the first time in his long musical career, thinking seriously about mortality, as he does in this album. Most of the work in this first new album of his in some time points clearly at immense, even cosmic, questions.

Simon has never been shy about grabbing musical ingredients from exotic sources. Some call him a creative genius; others accuse him of ice-cold carpet-bagging, traveling to South Africa to pick up new rhythms, then morphing those adopted native sounds—not to mention the natives themselves—into his compositions, as he did in both *Graceland* and *Rhythm of the Saints*. Here again, he uses all kinds of means to achieve what seems really verdant instrumentation.

The opening cut, "Getting Ready for Christmas Day," borrows snippets from a 1941 recorded sermon of Rev. J. M. Gates, in which the Reverend uses Christmas as a metaphor for his own, someday soon, meeting with Jesus. Although Paul Simon says he doesn't consider himself a religious man, one of this album's most obvious themes is religious; but then it's almost impossible not to consider religious ideas when thinking as seriously as he is here about death. References to Jesus Christ are not infrequent in *So Beautiful*, despite the fact that Simon, ethnically at least, is Jewish. But he's also playful, very playful, and will borrow ideas and images just as quickly as he borrows rhythms.

I'm not well enough acquainted with the folk rock scene today to make generalizations, but it seems to me that few singer/songwriters are capable of getting as much percussive playfulness from an acoustic guitar as Paul Simon. "Getting Ready for Christmas Day" rocks through some issues in today's world—money worries, war in the Middle East—and then, almost seamlessly, fuses the African-American sermon rhetoric of Rev. Gates's sermon: "Getting ready, ready for your prayers, 'I'm going to see my relatives in a distant land.' Getting ready, getting ready for Christmas Day," all of it rhythmically punctuated by amens and hallelujahs.

It's a marvelous single, seemingly disjointed yet skillfully unified by Simon's own late-in-life visions. A line like "If I could tell my Mom and Dad that the things we never had/Never mattered—we were always okay" has the definite feel of someone bring-

ing some healing to his or her own mysterious past.

He follows up with “The Afterlife,” a goofy bit of human imagining of life, post-mortem. Just like “Buddha and Moses and all the noses from narrow to flat,” there’s procedure after dying: “You got to fill out a form first/And then you wait in the line.” Sacrilegious?—well, sure. “To suffer and wait for the knowledge we seek/It’s all His design/No one cuts in the line/No one here likes a sneak”—Heaven as a medical clinic.

But when Simon’s persona finally gets his paperwork in, “The Lord God is near/Face-to-face in the vastness of space,” a place where “Your words disappear/And you feel like you’re swimming in an ocean of love.” What Paul Simon sees and sings is what troubadours have crooned since first stringing an instrument—what matters finally in this world is love, and love itself is as strong a theme as mortality in the *So Beautiful or So What*.

“Dazzling Blue” begins soberly, with the mystery of what is to come in the afterlife: “Truth or lie, the silence is revealing/An empty sky, a hidden mound of stone.” But technology has robbed us of at least some of the mystery: “But the CAT scan’s eye sees what the heart’s concealing/Now-a-days, when everything is known.” The music’s delightful syncopation, the almost magical percussion, simply will not allow moral seriousness. Besides, “Dazzling Blue” is unapologetic love song:

Dazzling blue, roses red, fine white linen
To make a marriage bed
And we’ll build a wall that nothing can break
through
And dream our dreams of dazzling blue.”

“Dazzling Blue,” the first of a few sweet love songs, is pure delight in sound and substance.

“Rewrite” is narrative, the story of an old man, a Vietnam vet perhaps, trying vainly to create art, a novel, a screenplay maybe, his own life perhaps, doing a rewrite while working in a car wash where both customers and co-workers seem to consider him a sad victim of his war experience. His petitions to God are only one moment of prayer in the album—there are more. But the summary I’ve just given makes the song sound more serious than it is. As someone on YouTube says, once again the imaginative beat reminds him of someone rhythmically

throwing a tennis ball up against a cement wall. Such darling rhythms and exotic audio effects won’t let you take the whole thing too seriously, even though the questions he asks are not trivial.

God Almighty returns in “Love and Hard Times,” a tune that begins with a patient piano intro and includes orchestral accompaniment in what seems all-that-is-right moments. It starts startlingly: “God and His only Son/Paid a courtesy call on Earth/One Sunday morning,” a beautiful morning. But the two of them leave rather quickly, more creation to manage, after they come to a sad conclusion—“these people are slobs here.” It’s more than a bit of a joke. Even though Paul Simon is decidedly serious in the album, he’ll never allow a listener to take him too seriously—he is, first of all, an artist, not a preacher. “God and His only Son” prepare to leave again, but then admit grudgingly that if they disappear, “it’s love and hard times.” Such is life, saith Paul Simon.

But the piece’s quirky theological intro—God and His son on an earthly stroll through what seems to them a despoiled garden—disappears for the remainder of what follows, as Simon creates yet another love song, perhaps the most ambitious of the album, with a line that concedes the difficulty of writing something fresh about love itself: “I loved her the first time I saw her/I know that’s an old songwriting cliché.” The story he tells, in images, is not without its heartaches—after all, it’s “love and hard times”; but the resolution comes soaring back with a mantra of blessed thanksgiving: “But then your hand takes mine/Thank God, I found you in time/Thank God I found you/Thank God, I found you.”

Something in “Love and Hard Times” sounds like “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” but it may just be me. Other hints and allusions to his most iconic songs are much harder to miss and add evocatively to the sense that this is, at times, his own retrospective.

“Love is Eternal Sacred Light” summons back both of the most important themes of the album—love and mortality—in a chorus of references and allusions to oddly aligned ideas, from anthropology to evolution, from Big Bang theory to talk radio (“politics is ugly”) and frightening Midwest blizzards, all of it communicated through a voice he employs occasionally in the album, the very voice

of his sense of God, in a blues-jam mix.

“Questions for the Angels” is just that—a list of unanswerables: “Who am I in this lonely world?” More allusions from old albums: “If an empty train in a railroad station/Calls you to its destination/Can you choose another track?” And then this: “If every human on the planet and all the buildings on it/Should disappear/Would a zebra grazing in the African savannah/ Care enough to shed one zebra tear?”

There is no reference to death and dying here, but the questions have this ultimate sense to them, questions that have puzzled human beings for centuries—questions for the angels, questions for the ages.

Most of the work in this first new album of his in some time points clearly at immense, even cosmic, questions.

The almost ragtime beat of “Love and Blessings” runs beneath what seems a pageant of images, some almost desperate, some sweet and fulfilling. But once again, in this cut, as elsewhere, Simon returns adoringly to the antidote for the blues, even as it pertains to death and dying. “In a word, or in an image/Something called me from my sleep/Love and blessings/Simple kindness/Ours to hold but not to keep.”

What’s here is an injunction to commit oneself and one’s life to love, even though human love, like everything else, is not forever—not in the sense of its being momentary or even transitory, however, but in the sense of simply not being eternal. Love is all we can ask for, all we can know of the eternal.

Paul Simon ends this short and tightly packed collection of new work with the title cut, a piece which gathers its almost hallucinatory strength from the simple fact that the entire piece, musically, is a relatively simple riff. In a way, “So Beautiful or So What” is a lament—not about love or the lack of it, but more importantly about how it is we all seem to discount life’s own richness, to look past its radi-

ance, to leave its bounty untouched:

Ain’t it strange the way we’re ignorant
How we seek out bad advice
How we jigger it and figure it
Mistaking value for the price
And play a game with time and love
Like a pair of rolling dice
So beautiful
So beautiful
So what

“So what”—the other side of “so beautiful” in the title—is, I think, deliberately ambiguous. Paul Simon isn’t simply discounting everything around him, finally playing the cynic, shrugging his shoulders and smirking and saying, “So what?” That phrase is not uttered simply in resignation. Read that way, the final line cuts against the grain of most of the album’s soulful optimism, its estimation of a “so beautiful” world. Read that way, “so what” undercuts everything else he’s suggested. Someone ultimately made the decision not to end the title with a question mark.

“So what?” I may be wrong, but I also hear Francis Schaeffer—so, given all of this, how are we going to live?” It’s the question he’s asking himself, and us, the question *not* for the angels but for the ages, a question that arises more frequently at the end of life, when there’s more to see and judge in the rearview mirror than out front and down the road.

So Beautiful or So What is, in a way, Paul Simon’s retrospective self-portrait, a meditation, a preemptive obit he’s created for himself, a collection that shows him at his creative best, turning out tunes and poems that challenge the listener with substantial questions people, like him, and me, ask when they come uncomfortably close to their allotted three-score and ten. As Elvis Costello says in the album’s liner notes, “I believe that this remarkable, thoughtful, often joyful record deserves to be recognized as among Paul Simon’s very finest achievements.”

And it’s fitting for me, too, this non-musician, to take another look at Paul Simon because I have a history with him, a history that includes a paper I wrote 43 years ago on the Dordt College campus to fulfill an assignment bestowed upon me by an

education prof who wasn't sure I could be properly recommended for teaching in a Christian school—after all, I listened to worldly music.

Back then, both of us were living through an era that has become its own brand, the late '60s, when an almost unbridgeable gap grew between flower children and the Ozzie and Harriet generation, parents shaped indelibly by the Great Depression and WWII. That old professor was concerned about secular music blaring from my dorm-room stereo by way of albums like *Sounds of Silence* (1965) and *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966). Because of my musical preferences, he had questions about my heart and soul, questions for which he wanted answers before he and the department he ran would recommend me. "Okay," he said, at one of the weekly conferences I was required to attend in his office, "if that music you listen to is so relevant, so important, then show me."

So I tried. The paper I wrote for him—long gone I'm sure, as is he—is probably the one I remember most clearly from my final year, even though I wasn't enrolled in his class and my careful unpacking of Paul Simon's lyrics had nothing whatsoever to do with achieving a semester grade. He wondered, seriously, whether a Christian school should hire someone who listened so intently to the music I did, and I knew that a lament like "The Sound of Silence" somehow captured in its thoughtful questioning a vision much broader and relevant to my life than what I perceived as his stiffly shuttered piety.

In a way, he was doing what all of us have to do—weighing what we see and hear around us by values that are enduring. That I thought him silly didn't stop me from writing the very best paper I could. This was no classroom exercise, and I knew it; that opportunity was an opportunity, I thought, for the student to teach the professor. I was a kid. I liked that reversal.

Years later, at a reading somewhere far away, I saw him once again. He seemed to me to be in a kind of awe, shocked that I now taught at the college he once did and was even representing that college. And he was proud, I think, patronizingly so, confident he'd played a significant role in my spiritual maturation. After all, how could someone like me have ever succeeded had not someone like

him made me accountable?

Maybe he was. That too is a question for the ages.

That whole story is a parable, really. In Dordt language, it offers a narrative that illustrates the conflict between what we learn from the revelation of Holy Scripture and what we learn by way of that other "revelation"—the story told by creation itself, *by our world*. What is Godliness? What is righteousness? What is obedience?

It could well be that those questions were classroom theory until the conflict—between what that old professor thought of as saintliness, based on his view of Scripture, and what I did, based on the way Paul Simon clearly sang to my heart and soul—worked itself out in a extra-curricular assignment and proved to me that Simon and Garfunkel had (and still have) something to say.

So I did. Or tried.

Even though today it would be easy for me to judge that old professor as a Neanderthal, who is to say that what he forced me to do nearly a half-century ago didn't shape me powerfully, albeit in ways he may well not have intended. God's ways are not our own. Take it from someone in his last year of long career of teaching at Dordt College.

Paul Simon's *So Beautiful or So What* speaks to me now just as surely as *The Sounds of Silence* did to me forty-plus years ago. Today, Simon is almost 70. Back then, a Jewish singer/songwriter from Brooklyn, New York, somehow managed to ask the questions I was asking, a Dutch-American kid from a tiny little town in the rural Midwest, a kid who knew almost nothing about a Calvinist heritage I somehow carried unknowingly. It was the late '60s, and both the kid and the old man were "of" a generation.

How might my analyses have changed in those 40 years? Quite simple, really. Back then, I probably believed that Paul Simon's art deliberately made broad philosophical statements, created a "message" somehow discoverable by devoted analysis of "the perspective" that lay beneath each and every composition. I was as sure as the old professor that art was only slightly different from preaching, that both genres were given, finally, to the bold print of propositional truth.

No more. Today, not to see even a deeply philosophical work like *So Beautiful* as playful is to miss its

richness and its own blessing. Art plays thoughtfully with life and truth; writers and artists often dance and sing but only rarely preach. Twisting the lyrics of Simon's latest album into propositional truth misses the joy in this album of songs of mortality. Paul Simon is asking the big, tough questions, but he's also having great fun.

In a You Tube video about the album, Simon says that the very first sound on the very first track is nothing more than a steam engine in slow motion—a sound he simply found fascinating and threw into the mix, almost willy-nilly. That's *play*—and that play is at the core of what he's done with *So Beautiful*. To say that takes nothing away from the accomplishment, nor does it in any way downplay the significance of the questions he's asking. But he

is singing with a smile.

All of which puts me in mind of something Dordt's first president, Rev. B. J. Haan, once told me. If he could do it all over, relive his life from the time he became a pastor, he said, he'd change a great deal because he had learned, through the years, that the way to the heart was through a smile, through laughter, through joy. Anyone who knew him in his last decade understands that assessment.

So finally, after all these years and all those songs, what I'm saying, Mr. Education Professor, is that, once more, Paul Simon's *memento mori* in *So Beautiful or So What* speaks to me just as clearly as anything he ever wrote.

I hope you understand.

Book Reviews

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*. Eds. Mark R. Gornik and Gregory Thompson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 440 pages. ISBN 978-0-8028-6525-0. Reviewed by R.D. Henderson, PhD, now researching and writing in The Netherlands.

Years ago I was convinced for quite some time that there were two authors with the name N. Wolterstorff, one writing on art and aesthetics and another on theories of knowledge and rationality. Now this collection of thirty-nine articles written over a period of forty year shows that there are six or seven—at least as far as breath of interest and depth of insight go. Two editors, in consultation with the author, have put together a well arranged, coherent collection of essays—some previously unpublished [See end note]. The collection contains revealing words of a father writing in grief over the death of a son; a son being instructed by a father out on the Minnesota plains; a brother speaking for the poor; a disciple spreading the message of the master; a political philosopher speaking for the rights of the oppressed; and a husband arguing on behalf of women in church office. Remarkably enough, the collection remains the work of one writer, the voice of one speaker! You may not like or agree with everything said—I don't—but the author speaks with an honest voice on hard topics. The book discusses real and difficult, not ephemeral or luxury, issues. There is a down-to-earth and direct quality to much of the writing. Its style shows care for clear communication and contact with the reader. Most of what is written intimates uprightness and a sense of goodness that is hard to resist.

Two of the sections in the book are about the author himself; they give the reader some of the background and context of the articles. They reveal that he was taught to seek what is good and right and demonstrate how he, as a long time professor of philosophy, taught others to do the same. These qualities and this carefully conceived collection put a burden on the reader to face various challenges, for example, to seek justice, to care for or about the poor, to seek beauty or aesthetic fittingness in architecture, ordinary life and worship. However, the labor of reading this collection is light, and the reward potentially great.

The book contains valuable stories, observations, and morals and demonstrates by example how to put together an argument and make a persuasive point. It makes some of Wolterstorff's other more technical writings easier to understand. A good place to start is at the front or the back of the book, reading these sections first. "The Grace That Shaped My Life" and the "Afterword" are personal stories about a writer who is reticent to talk about himself. Yet from them much can be learned and many insights gained.

Most of the book's contents are within the reach of

the ordinary reader; few presuppose technical training or expertise though some do have technical sections. The essays contain many valuable quotations from both modern and ancient authors, including Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Weber, H.R. Niebuhr, A. MacIntyre, and Walzer, as well as some lengthy passages from the Bible. It is fascinating to observe Wolterstorff's unfamiliar way of formulating familiar Christian doctrines and beliefs. The article "Seeking Justice in Hope" gives valuable glimpses into what real faith is, true Biblical hope in contrast to mere secular "optimism." It advises doing our work in hope even when the outcome is very uncertain. "The Political Ethics of the Reformers" lays out a clear and revealing contrast between Medieval ideas about human fulfillment and the sixteenth-century Reformers' ideas about the human responsibility to hear and live by the word of God. There are discussions that engender real appreciation of liturgy and music and invite deep reflection on their place in life and worship. A consideration of different approaches to church architecture, based on the author's own experience, is given in two articles.

"Letter to a Young Theologian" offers a fascinating glimpse into what is expected of a Christian theologian—and an academic quite generally. It is instructive and shows some of Wolterstorff's own theological leanings and theoretical proclivities. It is one of the most revealing essays in regard to his own scholarly work and practice. The article "Has the Cloak Become a Cage? Love, Justice, and Economic Activity" offers informative commentary on current economic realities and moral dilemmas created by them. In this 2006 article, Wolterstorff as much as predicts, in a very general way, the 2008 economic bank collapse. He also provides a short but valuable characterization of some of Max Weber's most influential ideas about secularization, economics, and modern society.

Besides commenting on these public issues, the book contains some personal reflections on Wolterstorff's own grief and his thoughts about the nature of lamentation as presented in the Bible. It argues for the propriety of honest grieving over a loss and against trying to cover up or analyze away our suffering into steps and phases identifiable by therapists. Wolterstorff's reflections here are informed by the writings of John Calvin on suffering—in his "The wounds of God: Calvin's Theology of Social Injustice." This and other essays in the collection are written in the shadow of the loss in 1983 of his own son Eric. Calvin's

criticism of the Stoic negation of grief is presented, and following him, Wolterstorff advocates “*giving voice to the suffering that accompanies deep loss*” (81). He explains lament as “*the bringing to speech of suffering*.” In the Bible, he says, there are many examples of upright lamentation. He quotes Calvin again, arguing that rather than being indifferent or apathetic towards our suffering, God is moved, sharing our sadness and is Himself pained. At the end of his “If God is Good and Sovereign, Why Lament?” he wrestles with Calvin’s thought that “the suffering that comes our way is for our good and that we must, accordingly, endure it with grateful patience” (92). But “what about my son?” Wolterstorff asks. Didn’t God want continued earthly existence for him? Like many people in Scripture, he does not understand why things have gone awry. “So I join the psalmist in lament,” he says, and “I voice my suffering, naming it and owning it,” yet endure in faith.

An issue written about in many contexts and with great passion is justice, or love and justice; it has occupied Wolterstorff for many years, and the book chronicles various times and places he has spoken up for people who were being wronged. Wolterstorff conceives of justice in terms of all people possessing natural human rights. “Every human being,” he affirms, “has a natural right to genuine and fair access to adequate means of sustenance” (391). The basis of rights is that all human beings are made in the image of God and are objects of God’s love and care. Wolterstorff sees justice and natural human rights as inextricably linked. In a number of articles including “Why Care About Justice?” Wolterstorff cites many familiar Biblical passages demonstrating God’s enduring concern for justice. He believes that Scripture from cover to cover drives home the message that we too are to care for and to work to lighten the burdens of the poor, the blind, the oppressed, the captive.

In his article “The Troubled Relationship between Christians and Human Rights,” the lack of an explicit language of rights in Scripture is mentioned. The link between justice and rights, to Wolterstorff, is the Biblical teaching about being wronged and being forgiven; these, he says, presuppose a notion of human rights, “even though the concept itself may not be employed” (151). Wolterstorff believes the cause of justice (for all) is well served by thinking and speaking in terms of human rights, and that failing to do so is a serious error. On this difficult subject I beg to differ with Wolterstorff. To my mind, the absence in Scripture of a language of rights is significant. In the gospels the (second) command to “love your neighbor as yourself” is always linked to and follows from the first, namely, to “love God with your whole heart . . .” Speaking of a human “right” or “rights” alone loses this

connection. Is there ever a right without a corresponding responsibility—to God? To my mind, “rights talk” is one-sided. It conjures up a universe of discourse foreign to Biblical religion, positing the basis of a claim in man himself alone. It also has the problem of implying that we do not need to say “thank you” to anyone because what we enjoy is ours by right.

One clue to the idea of human rights concerns this question: what and who make up a community? “Natural human rights” seems to imply that all people are one community. And, while in a limited sense this is true, still clearly, not all people are of one nationality, one family, one faith, one language, etc. Important distinctions are rightly made based on such membership. As a member of the human race I am universally forbidden to murder any (and every) fellow human being. But am I thereby equally legally bound to provide “genuine and fair access to adequate means of sustenance” to everyone? All of this, including the idea of “access,” seems ambiguous to me. The need for discretion and good judgment are also strangely lacking in the picture here suggested.

As I see it, the idea of universal human rights confuses a universal ethical with a particular legal notion. Wolterstorff affirms an ethical connection that imposes a legal obligation on and between all people. However, legal obligations depend upon (something like) a constitution or set of laws spelling out legal ties, rights, and responsibilities within some specific community. Am I legally obliged to provide for one or more impoverished communities in India or China?

Two minor shortcomings of the book are its lack of index and system. The conclusions drawn in one article that could be applied in a similar context in another are often missing. Although unpopular today, isn’t giving voice to your own *system of thought* still a philosopher’s duty, especially for a gifted one like Nicholas Wolterstorff?

Given its broad scope and practical character, this book has a wide educational value and can be read fruitfully in either a casual or a studious way. It discusses some of the most difficult, basic human problems in a careful, committed, and elevated manner. It reflects the beauty and pain of a many-faceted reality discussed with insight—conceived and spoken about in a single voice. In it I have found myself, and I suspect many others will also find themselves, *bearing the call*.

[Note: One of these, “The Political Ethic of the Reformers,” is undated, but the author comments, “I would guess, from the 1970’s.” That was indeed a guess, since two books discussed in this very valuable article were not published until 1981 and 1982.]

Chaplin, Jonathan. *Herman Dooyeweerd: Christian Philosopher of State and Civil Society*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. 452 pages including bibliography. ISBN-13: 978-0-26802305-8. Reviewed by Keith C. Sewell, Professor of History, Dordt College.

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), Christian philosopher and legal thinker from the Netherlands, has not always been well-served by his English-language translators or North American publishers. At the same time, it must be said that the originality of much of his thinking was not always matched by a readily accessible style of writing, and this disparity helps to explain why his thought has sometimes been presented inadequately or even inaccurately by commentators and critics. Thankfully, the tide is changing. The works of Dooyeweerd are now appearing in English at a reasonable price through the Dooyeweerd Center at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and the Reformational Publishing Project based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The appearance of this important book by Jonathan Chaplin is a further positive development. It will provide those new to Dooyeweerd studies with an introduction that is both accessible and competent. Chaplin has taught at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, and has been the Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Cambridge, England, since 2006.

A clear strength of this book is that it does not assume any detailed prior understanding of Dooyeweerd's systematic philosophy. Rather, as the subtitle indicates, the author focuses on the state and civil society. This is not only Chaplin's primary area of concern but also one of the best ways to introduce non-philosophers to Dooyeweerd's thinking generally and to demonstrate its relevance and constructive fruitfulness to what is often called "the real world." For Chaplin, the context is our contemporary situation in which the functioning of (purportedly) autonomous markets militates against the workings of governments and civil society generally—increasingly in situations marked by financial and socio-economic turbulence (6-7). This situation calls for a deepening of our understanding of civil society—a nuanced grasp of the diverse and inter-acting social entities functioning in complex western societies, along with a principled understanding of our Christian calling in such settings. It is here that Dooyeweerd excels. Chaplin is clear that his approach "displays impressive . . . salience today" (13). More specifically, Chaplin's purpose is to demonstrate just how relevant Dooyeweerd's work is for understanding the scope of civil society, the relationship between it and the state, and its utility in the formulation of social critique (18).

Chaplin lays the groundwork in his second and third chapters by placing Dooyeweerd in his Dutch milieu and then in chapter four by addressing Dooyeweerd's understanding of both religion and philosophy. Chaplin has the gift of clear written expression, and one can only regret that such a fine overview and exposition, beautifully contextualized, was not available to English-only readers forty

or fifty years ago. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Chaplin is not an unquestioning Dooyeweerd disciple. He criticizes questions and refines the content and balance of Dooyeweerd's formulations and respects the observations of others, such as Henk Geertsema, Sander Griffioen, and Nick Wolterstorff (78, 92-93, 98-101).

The fifth chapter considers the charge that Dooyeweerd's proposal—that societal institutions exhibit an "invariant structural principle"—"baptizes the [existing] institutions of the modern west," thereby tilting everything in the direction of conservatism (71). The discussion focuses on what Dooyeweerd meant by "cultural disclosure"—how human culturally-wrought innovation actualizes hitherto unrealized structural potentialities. Chaplin has some qualified sympathy for those who have found Dooyeweerd to be Eurocentric according to his examples, even though that was not his intention (84-85).

The sixth chapter addresses the weightier question of whether Dooyeweerd's dynamic understanding of "cultural disclosure" nevertheless produced, in his theory, a view of social structures as basically static, in that they are bound to invariable structural principles without which they would not retain their necessary character (86), hence the charge of "essentialism" (71-72). Here Chaplin concludes that this criticism is not wholly valid, especially when Dooyeweerd's formulations are read in their full nuances (107-109).

In chapter seven Chaplin considers the medley of social structures, their diversity, and the enriching complexity of their inter-relationships and how, in that context, Dooyeweerd takes us way beyond the basic formulations of Abraham Kuyper (139-151). Chaplin emphasizes that Dooyeweerd surpasses the false mirror-image alternatives of individualism and universalism (151-155). Only in the wake of this discussion does Chaplin adequately prepare the ground for his systematic discussion of the state, offered in the eighth chapter.

He there sheds light on the traditional contrasting of "might" and "right"—power and justice. Both are indispensable, and neither should be set over against the other (165-176). Chaplin is less than happy with Dooyeweerd's view that the state is founded in the human exercise of power (185).

Certainly, however its basis is understood, the state, as the ninth chapter emphasizes, is called not only to be just but to provide public social justice as only it can (201). From these insights the discussion moves to a consideration of matters such as popular elections, the role of political parties and the play of public opinion (213-15).

Chaplin's concluding tenth and eleventh chapters address the application of Dooyeweerd's thinking to more

contemporary situations. He discusses how the provision and maintenance of public justice in complex societies require of the state that it foster and uphold the development and functioning of non-state social structures, recognizing that persons have callings and responsibilities that extend beyond those of citizenship. Here Chaplin gives extended attention to elucidating what only lies implicit or is insufficiently developed in Dooyeweerd's writings. He repeatedly shows that where difficulties seem to arise, these may often be resolved within the framework of Dooyeweerd's thinking (107, 178, 216).

The picture that emerges is one of an active state that facilitates much but that is not all-encompassing (226-35). The discussion is impressively wide-ranging, touching the U. S. Constitution on church and state (251-2) and the issues raised by the behavior of corporate capitalism (255-6). The eleventh chapter proceeds to discuss how all of this relates to civil society generally. It construes civil society as "that realm of social interactions embracing the dense networks of interlinkages [better, "interdependencies"] characteristic of a modern society" (283, cf. 285). These latter chapters are infor-

mative and richly suggestive for those seeking to confront the complexities of our times from a Christian-principled standpoint. The importance of the state's protective (290) and adjudicative (298) responsibilities is considered, even as Chaplin remains concerned about Dooyeweerd's reserve when it comes to a transformative function of the state (301). His was essentially a reformist outlook (303), arguably attributable to the strong "anti-revolutionary" orientation of the Kuyperian legacy.

In his "Epilogue" Chaplin argues that, as we move into a post-secular era, there has loomed up in western jurisdictions a need for coherent reflection on public justice and civil society issues that current political elites, and the interests and priorities that they represent, are unable and/or unwilling to provide. This inability or unwillingness explains Chaplin's preference for a more transformative approach. This book is not a *quick* read, but it is an immensely rewarding and instructive *careful* read. It is unquestionably *the* work in English on Dooyeweerd's thought in relation to public justice and civil society and is strongly recommended.

Van Drunen, David. *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010. 208 pages. ISBN 978-1-4335-1404-3. Reviewed by Carl E. Zylstra, President, Dordt College.

For the past few years a mini-tempest has been brewing over the question of whether David Van Drunen, a legal and theological scholar currently teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, may have finally landed the coup de grace that would put the neo-Kuyperian reformational project to rest once and for all. In fact, in an earlier volume expounding on his theory of the two kingdoms, Van Drunen himself asks critics to await this final volume on biblical ethics before judging the impact of his argument.

The positive aspect of this awaited volume is that it is now obvious that Van Drunen believes it is either his way or Kuyper's way—explicitly referring to the latter as "not biblical" (13). Unfortunately, there isn't likely to be much in this volume that will actually convince many neo-Kuyperians to give up their quest. Rather, they are likely just to get mad.

For instance, in his first book Van Drunen dismisses as self-evident silliness the attempt of a Christian college to infuse its student activities with biblical norms and the attempt of Christian professional agriculturalists to develop biblical norms for the care of their animals and for carrying out business practices (*Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 4-5). This new volume shows that his criticism was not just an attempt to pick on a particular college (Dordt College) or a particular group of professionals (Dutch goat breeders). Rather, Van Drunen really does intend to dismiss as totally misguided the entire enterprise of Christian day school education, which at least one key wing of the Reformed tradition

has always considered essential to living out their faith. Moreover, Van Drunen's explicit rejection of the necessity of biblical norms for vocation and civic engagement makes clear his view that the last couple of centuries of (at least some traditions in) the Reformed homiletical exhortation to serve Christ's kingdom in both daily occupations and civic duty has amounted to little more than whistling in the wind.

The problem with Van Drunen's effort is that he seems to think he is telling the Reformed community something they didn't already know. But the Reformed community has been well aware of this difference of perspective among themselves for a century at least. For instance, Dordt College itself is located in a region of the country that has, for almost 100 years, experienced a very keen division over exactly these arenas of Christian education and biblically normed civic engagement. Indeed, in the Northwest Iowa area, still today one wing of the Reformed community views Christian schooling as so essential to living out their faith in Jesus Christ that parents are willing to hold down two jobs, conduct bake sales, and do without family vacations or homes at the lake in order to make this separate system of Christian day school education possible. Meanwhile, the other wing of the Reformed tradition continues to view such a commitment as optional quirkiness at best and un-American separatism at worst. Van Drunen doesn't seem to view such schools as unpatriotic, but he does make clear that he believes cultural engagement takes place better in a round of golf at a fine country club (25-26) than it does in the local Christian school gym.

Now the author may take exception to some of this characterization. He insists, for instance, that if parents want to educate their children in a Christian school, they should feel free to do so, provided the schools meet other apparently more important criteria such as academic achievement. However, Van Drunen misses (or dismisses) the point that has driven generations of parents to establish and maintain Christian day schools. The point of these dedicated Christian communities is their conviction that Christian perspective on all of life simply is never optional. Educating a child to look at the world through anything less than scripturally shaped lenses is considered a violation of the parents' responsibility to their child, to the Christian community to whom the child belongs, and to the kingdom of the Christ in whose name the child was baptized. They have always believed that any pedagogical deficiencies in the school should be corrected and any academic lapses should be made up as the child continues to grow. But to disobey the biblical command to train up a child in the way he or she should go simply never entered their Reformed minds.

Nor do matters get much better when Van Drunen turns his sights onto the notion of Christian communal obedience in engaging culture in the name of Christ, what Andy Crouch has recently called "culture making." Almost astoundingly in an avowedly "Reformed" book, Van Drunen specifically dismisses the continuing relevance of the cultural mandate (26). Van Drunen, however, is explicit that Christian communal actions end at the church door (26, 163), and that the dream of civic and vocational life infused by Christian principles as an outgrowth of principled Christian education is a personal option at best (163).

It should be admitted, however, that even for those Reformed Christians whose convictions Van Drunen's book derides, there are legitimate critiques. Indeed, I personally share his aversion to much of the language of "transformation," preferring instead to emphasize Christ's final words to us—that we know neither the time nor the hour when the Father will "restore the kingdom to Israel." And so, according to our Lord (Acts 1), the Christian community's task is to "witness" to the work of transformation that he and the Father will accomplish through the Spirit, whom they will send.

Yet that observation need not lead to his rather breathtaking (at least for someone who claims Reformed pedigree) perspective that the notion of cosmic redemption is somehow a nineteenth-century Reformed perversion. At times it seems as if Van Drunen, in this volume, has completely overlooked the classic Reformed texts such as

John 3.17, Colossians 1.17, and I Corinthians 15.58, with their inspiring vision of complete renewal of the cosmos in Jesus Christ and the subsequent call to live obediently already now in the light of that heavenly vision.

I do believe that Van Drunen has made the case that, at least in terms of soteriology as applied to the individual, he remains firmly within the Reformed camp. Yet it is not clear he would return the favor, given this volume's stunning opening pages, in which Van Drunen manages to poison the well against the neo-Kuyperians through an explicit and extended effort to paint a picture of guilt by association with two "bogeymen" of the conservative Reformed community: NT Wright and the emerging church movement.

Yet even if this "two kingdom" perspective can claim a Reformed veneer, it is certainly less clear whether Van Drunen's viewpoint would sustain a vital Reformed community such as the one that underwrites this journal. The college whose faculty produces this journal is committed to a vision of what our foundational documents describe as a "Christian college in which all of the student's intellectual, social, and imaginative activities are permeated by the spirit and teaching of Christianity." I suggest that, at least for those who share the insights that have given rise to Reformed institutions and full-orbed Christian communal engagement with all of vocation and culture, this volume is scarcely compelling.

In the end this volume really does little more than make clear that Reformed Christians disagree among themselves over demands on their obedience that the cosmic claims of Christ make in our lives together. But that was always obvious to anyone who has ever tried to make the case for Christian education and the communal cultural and civic engagement that results. There have always been those who do and those who don't take seriously that using the Scripture as our only norm for faith—and life—includes all of life.

Perhaps it really does come down to a choice. There may be those who truly believe that Christian discipleship arises, first of all, out of intellectual elaboration of the finer points of systematic theology, following a friendly round of golf. Yet, at least for institutions such as the one that publishes this journal, we can be grateful that there also continue to be communities of those who, while washing dishes after the most recent fund-raising supper for the local Christian school, find their greatest joy in singing while they work, "For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but simply to trust *and obey*"—in each and every part of life.

Submissions

We invite letters to the editor and articles, of between 2,500 and 8,000 words, double-spaced, using MLA or *Chicago Style Manual* documentation. Subjects should be approached from a Reformed Christian perspective and should treat issues, related to education, in the areas of theology, history, literature, the arts, the sciences, the social sciences, technology, and media. Please include a cover letter with your e-mail address and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Send your submission to the following:

Pro Rege

c/o Dr. Mary Dengler, Editor
Dordt College
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Sioux Center, Iowa 51250

Dordt College is a Christian liberal arts college in Sioux Center, Iowa, which believes that the Bible is the infallible and inspired Word of God and which bases the education it provides upon the Bible as it is explained in the Reformed creeds. Hence, the college confesses that our world from creation to consummation belongs to God, that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, and that true comfort and reliable strength can be had only from his Holy Spirit.

Dordt College was established in 1955 and owes its continuing existence to a community of believers that is committed to supporting Christian schools from kindergarten through college. Believing in the *Creator* demands obedience to his principles in all of life: certainly in education but also in everything from art to zoology.

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