

REASON AND BELIEF IN GOD

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In his article “Fides et Ratio” (*Philosophia Reformata* 2000, 65: 72-104), Eduardo Echeverria states he is writing out of his concern that since “... the lack of unity among Christians represents the grave obstacle for the proclamation of the gospel, we should take every suitable opportunity to increase the unity of all Christians. The present essay is meant as a contribution toward this goal.”(p.72). The increased unity he has in mind is a reconciliation of the traditional scholastic interpretation of Christian doctrine (which he designates the “TSC”), and the Calvinist tradition (which I will designate the “CT”). More specifically, he seeks a unity between them concerning the relation of faith and reason, that is, the role of reason in belief in God. To this end he compares what he understands of the CT, as represented by Calvin and Dooyeweerd, with the CST as represented by St Thomas and the encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (1998) by Pope John Paul II..

In all that follows I will be agreeing with Echeverria that this is, indeed, an important concern and a laudable goal, and I hope that what I offer here in reply to his essay will be taken in that same charitable spirit. So even though I find that Echeverria’s account of the differences between the TSC and the CT is seriously mistaken, I do agree that it would go a long way toward greater cooperation between our two traditions if we could at least agree on what our differences are and work toward resolving them. For that reason I will be more concerned here with clarifying those differences than with arguing for the CT. That does not mean that I will not at times offer brief accounts of why I think the CT is right to differ from the TSC on certain points; it only means that I do not regard the case I will make for these points as anywhere near complete. This brevity is made necessary because I find the misunderstandings of Calvin, and especially of Dooyeweerd, to be so many and so knotted in “Fides et Ratio” as to form a tangled skein that would require more than just one article to unravel. I have also decided that there are so many strands to this skein that for the sake of clarity I will restrict myself to only a few of them. My assumption is that it would be better to make real progress with getting a few key differences in focus, than to end up producing a tangle of my own in an attempt to cover every point raised in Echeverria’s long article. My hope is that the treatment of the points I do cover will be sufficient to indicate how a more thorough untangling would proceed.

Before any attempt at unraveling his skein, however, I think it necessary to express two reservations about the way Echeverria poses the problem to be solved. My first reservation is offered in the form of two questions: is it really true that what divides the body of Christ in such a way as to impede the proclamation of the gospel is the difference between the TSC’s account of the relation between reason and belief in God as compared with the CT’s account? More specifically, does Calvin’s - and especially Dooyeweerd’s - understanding of the Fall as including the fall of reason impede the preaching of the gospel? My answer to both these questions is negative, and I cannot imagine how an affirmative answer could be defended. Christians have always had

differences concerning such abstract theological issues as free will and predestination, the order of God's decrees, the precise nature of original sin, the exact formulation of how the sacraments are to be understood, and even varying theories of the atonement. For many centuries, however, such differences never produced any serious organizational fracture in the church militant. There were divergent theologies, liturgies, and modes of organization within the church but there was still one church. In fact, to this day there is enormous agreement on the fundamental doctrines of the Faith as found in the creedal statements of every major Christian denomination.

It is strange, therefore, that "Fides et Ratio" calls for a reconciliation of the differences between the TSC and CT interpretations of how reason relates to belief in God as though that is responsible for the fracture of the church. And it is especially ironic that this proposal comes from the Roman Catholic side of the discussion when the most obvious candidate for *the* causes of church fracture are the claims of the Bishop of Rome to be the head bishop of the entire church, the Vicar of Christ on earth, and (since 1870) to speak infallibly on doctrinal matters. The first claim split the church in 1054, and more than any other issue was responsible for the split in the 16th century as well. The Orthodox bishops had replied to Rome's claims for centuries prior to 1054 by saying that there had never been one head bishop of the whole church, and that the alleged scriptural ground for the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome was based (in part) on a mistranslation from Greek to Latin of Jesus' words to St Peter in Matt. 16:18. The Reformers repeated these same points in the 16th century, but to no avail. And to this day the supremacy claims of the Bishop of Rome remain the single greatest cause of division in the church.

Nevertheless, it is not at all clear to me why even this disagreement should be called "*the* grave obstacle for the proclamation of the gospel." The history of this controversy is an embarrassment, to be sure, especially when we are forced to acknowledge the persecutions, inquisitions, and other atrocities that were sponsored by several bishops of Rome in order to enforce their supremacy claims. But even that terrible chronicle does not now prevent the gospel's being preached, so far as I can see. Perhaps Echeverria means only to suggest that the divisions of the church prevent the gospel from being proclaimed *as effectively as it could be* were the church to speak with one voice and act as one and the same organization throughout the world. That may well be true. But, I repeat, it is hardly the differences over the role of reason in acquiring belief in God as understood by Thomas Aquinas and Pope John Paul II on the one side, compared with Calvin and Dooyeweerd on the other side, that prevents such a unity.

My second reservation about the way Echeverria poses the problem to be addressed is that it is phrased as though the Thomistic position is *the* Roman Catholic position, so that it is Thomism that must be reconciled with Calvin and/or Dooyeweerd. To be sure, John Paul II writes from a Thomistic standpoint. But even so, his office does not make his position the official view of the Church. There are many non-Thomist voices among philosophers and theologians in the Roman Catholic tradition, and a genuine reconciliation of Christian interpretations of doctrine would therefore have to include these voices as well. They ought not to be ignored so as to confer an unofficial hegemony on Thomism.

These reservations aside, I will now concentrate on specific issues of difference between the two traditions addressed in “Fides et Ratio”. First, I will take an issue common to the entire Calvinist tradition (including Dooyeweerd), namely, the impact of the Fall on reason. Then I will try to correct some of the more egregious misunderstandings specific to Dooyeweerd. These will include his view of heart belief and knowledge of God as distinguished from belief as intellectual assent to propositions, the question of whether his position on the religious control of theories is a species of “hard perspectivalism” which is self-referentially incoherent, and finally some misunderstandings of his positions on religious language, God’s nature, and the nature and need for metaphysics.

I. REASON WOUNDED vs. REASON FALLEN

Echeverria offers a summary of Dooyeweerd’s statement of the Calvinist position on the impact of the Fall on human reason in items he denotes as A, B, and C on pp. 75 - 76. The summary, and the quotes included in them, are all aimed at expressing that human reason is not autonomous (religiously neutral) but is faith-controlled. The summary is fair enough, but before going any further I need to point out that a serious misunderstanding already lurks here in the use of the term “faith”. For a Thomist, the term connotes a power distinct from reason by which humans are enabled to believe revealed truth. This power is not common to all people, for the Thomist, but is a special gift of God (a *donum superadditum*). Truth attained by this power is thus contrasted with “knowledge”. For Thomas the term “knowledge” was restricted to whatever is evident to the senses, self-evident, or proven, so that the references of Bible writers to the “knowledge of God” must be explained as dependent on the (alleged) fact that God’s existence can be proven. It needs to be made clear right away, therefore, that the Reformers did not use “faith” as the name of a distinct, additional, mental power. They held faith to be common to all people when the term is used to mean belief in something as divine. The grace of God, they said, does not create a new power in the redeemed but restores to proper working order the impulse innate to all people to have some divinity belief. For them the issue was not whether a person has faith or lacks it, but only whether a person has faith in the right divinity or a false one. So they held that whereas everyone has some divinity belief, it takes the grace of God to redirect that belief to Himself and away from whatever false divinity belief a person may hold instead.

Neither did the Reformers separate divinity beliefs from reason in such a way that belief in God is nonrational or unable to be called knowledge. Calvin, for example, clearly rejects that meaning of the term “faith” and that explanation of its (alleged) difference from reason. For him “faith” is defined as “a firm and sure *knowledge* of the Divine favor towards us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit.” (*Inst.* III, ii, 7). Following in this line of thought, Dooyeweerd also does not accept the view that believing what has been revealed by God is the result of a power other than reason, but is the result of the conversion of reason itself as a consequence of having the human heart restored to its

ability to recognize directly the truth of the gospel. It is this same opening of the heart that also restores the function of trust or faith so that it embraces, rests in, and relies upon, that truth. So although he denies that belief in God's reality can be the result of constructing proofs, he does not deny that it is rational, justified, knowledge. This is because inference is not the only sort of justified belief. There is also direct, non-inferential apprehension of truth by reason, the sort of apprehension that many philosophers of the past have called "intuitive". This is clearly the position of Calvin also:

As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that [scripture] came from God without recurring to a decree of the Church? it is just the same as if we were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste.¹

But although we may maintain the Sacred Word of God against gainsayers, it does not follow we shall forthwith implant the certainty which faith requires in their hearts. Profane men think that religion rests only on opinion and therefore in order not to believe foolishly or on slight grounds, desire and insist to have it proved by reason that Moses and the prophets were divinely inspired. But I answer that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is superior to reason. (*Inst.* I, vii, 4)

...Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit [of God]. (*Inst.* I, vii, 5)

It is the restoration of the human *heart* by the Holy Spirit which, for both Calvin and Dooyeweerd, results in reason seeing the truth of the gospel and thus believing it - though Dooyeweerd adds that this belief is expressed via the faith aspect of human experience so that concrete acts of belief are "pistically qualified". But here again there is an important difference to be noted about the meaning of the term "heart" as it is understood by the CT. Dooyeweerd explains at length that he understands "heart" in the sense used by Bible writers, and not in the sense common today by which it refers to feeling rather than reason.² For Dooyeweerd the heart is the unity of the human self which is the source of reason, emotion, will, and all else that makes up human nature.³

¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), I, vii, 2.

² Cmp. *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co.), Forword to the First Edition, v; I, 65; II 299; and *In The Twilight of Western Thought*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1960), 173-195.

³ Cmp. the entry for "heart" in *International Dictionary of the Bible*, Ed. George Arthur Buttrick. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) vol. II, p, 549. It should also be noted that some Bible writers, e.g., Paul, at times use "spirit" in the same way.

This is why if the heart of man is fallen, as scripture asserts, then reason is also fallen and why if the heart is enlightened reason is too. By contrast, Echeverria, following John Paul II, views the heart as something other than reason (emotion?) that can impede reason so that it fails to do its job properly (p. 80). So it seems clear that Echeverria has completely missed both these crucial differences of meaning (the meaning of “faith” and the meaning of “heart”). And these misunderstandings have a ripple effect throughout all the rest of what he says about the CT view of faith and reason.

Having summarized Dooyeweerd’s statement of the Calvinist position, Echeverria does not then immediately criticize it, but instead compares it to another part of the papal encyclical from which his article takes its title, the part he calls “a hymn to reason”. That is, he first summarizes the Calvin/Dooyeweerd opposition to regarding reason as religiously neutral, and then compares that opposition to a completely different point, namely, whether reason can be relied on at all. I find this procedure to be disingenuous in the extreme. To take a point made in opposition to a form of rationalism and accuse it of failing to critique modern forms of irrationalism, does not produce a legitimate criticism. To be fair to Dooyeweerd, the papal encyclical’s defense of the reliability of reason should be compared to Dooyeweerd’s criticisms of irrationalism, not rationalism. And Dooyeweerd has offered many criticisms of irrationalism. For example, he constantly reminds his readers that all humans are confronted in their experience with “undeniable states of affairs”. He often reiterates that “pretheoretical experience” is itself no theory, and he gives us a critique of theories that shows the incoherence of any theory that attempts to refute pretheoretical experience (*N.C.* III, 66). Moreover he often re-affirms the principle of non-contradiction. So while Echeverria correctly points out that John Paul’s encyclical holds to both the correspondence view of truth and a metaphysical realism, he fails to note in this context that Dooyeweerd agrees with both those positions (though he does seem to admit this later at the top of p. 82!). Instead, Echeverria immediately contrasts the papal position with historicist relativism on the one hand, and fideism on the other hand. And while he recognizes that neither Calvin nor Dooyeweerd are relativists, he does accuse them of fideism. So the question is, what does he mean by “fideism”?

On pp. 79 - 81 fideism is described, in the words of John Paul’s encyclical, as the failure to recognize the importance of “rational knowledge *and philosophical discourse* for the understanding of the Faith, indeed, *for the very possibility of belief in God.*” (p.79, italics added). This description is, of course, a mixed bag. No Calvinist I know of ever denied that reason is involved in understanding the Faith - where “faith” with a capital F connotes the content of revelation (*fides quae*). But I’m happy to say also that I know of no Calvinist who ever said that philosophical discourse is a necessary condition for “the very possibility of belief in God”! Indeed, what could possibly be the reason for such an assertion? Are there not millions of people who came to believe in God as children? Are there not countless millions more who love God but who have never done philosophy or even heard of it? Were there not heroes of faith - patriarchs, and prophets - prior to the rise of philosophy? And what of the New Testament’s insistence that the necessary and sufficient condition of someone’s heart being opened to the gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit, rather than “rational knowledge and philosophical discourse”? (Notice that I

didn't say that philosophical discourse *couldn't* be used by the Spirit among the provisions of prevenient grace which aid in bringing some people to confront the gospel message; I only said that it isn't necessary for *the very possibility* of believing that message.)

Here again, we meet with the same blind spot mentioned earlier. Both the papal encyclical and Echeverria use "reason" to mean only *reasoning*, the making inferences, devising of arguments, and weighing of evidence. Reason in its intuitive function is entirely overlooked, despite the fact that it is a function which is both indispensable to knowledge generally and affirmed as the ground of belief in God by Calvin. And not only Calvin. Here is a splendid statement of it from the Catholic thinker, Blaise Pascal:

We know truth not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles; and reason which has no part in it, tries in vain to impugn them...[For example] we know that we do not dream... however impossible it is for us to prove it by reason... the knowledge of first principles, such as space, time, motion, and number is as sure as any of those we get from reasoning. And reason must trust these intuitions of the heart, and must base every argument upon them... Therefore, those to whom God has imparted religion by intuition are very fortunate, and justly convinced.⁴

Here Pascal is contrasting reason in the sense of *reasoning* to direct, non-inferential, intuitive knowledge which he, along with the CT, calls knowledge of the heart. The latter is not irrational, however, but lies at a deeper level than that of discursive inference-making. Notice how Pascal points out that it is in this way that we know basic scientific principles, so he cannot be accused of regarding heart-knowledge as a matter merely of hunches or feelings. His position can be summarized this way: we do not believe the axioms of space, time, motion, or number (and we could add: the principle of non-contradiction) because we have proofs of them, but that fact doesn't make us irrationalists or fideists with respect to them. So why should it make us irrationalists or fideists to believe in God on the same sort of intuitive ground? I find, therefore, that Pascal is here affirming in different words the same position expressed in the earlier quotes from Calvin. For neither thinker is belief in God a proven truth inferred from other information (remember that Pascal also said: "To those who believe no proof is necessary; to those who do not, no proof is possible"). But for neither thinker does faith in God lack justification, nor is it less than knowledge.

Thus there is a deep difference between the Calvin/Pascal/Dooyeweerd position and that of the papal encyclical which Echeverria quotes approvingly as follows: "human reason of itself, operating by its own principles, concepts and criteria, can lead to a knowledge both of God's existence and the world's dependence upon him as Creator" (p.79). But while neither Calvin nor Pascal nor Dooyeweerd agree with that, neither do

⁴ *Pensees*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1966), 58.

they hold that belief in God is thereby irrational - though Echeverria thinks they must. He asks: "Doesn't Dooyeweerd's religious commitment to the existence of an absolute standard of truth then itself require rational justification? Otherwise it would appear to be a blind commitment." (p. 90). But how would that objection play out when applied to the principle of noncontradiction? What *could* constitute a rational justification of it? And if we have none, is *it* therefore a "blind commitment"? Hasn't it long been held on the grounds that it is intuitively self-evident? Surely it has. Hence there seems to be no good reason to hold that a belief is knowledge only if it is evident to the senses or has the sort of rational justification provided by argument or weighing of evidence. Surely there are basic beliefs whose truth is directly experienced so that, although they lack justification by argument, they nevertheless have warranted certainty and are not merely "blind commitment".⁵ And this is exactly what the CT says of belief in God.

It appears, however, that this point about the intuitive function of reason would not, all by itself, daunt Echeverria's objection to the view that reason is in a fallen condition and unable, without being restored to proper working order, to know God. For whether this condition is construed as reason's inability to infer God's existence or as reason's inability to intuitively "see" revealed truth, it still asserts the inability of the unregenerate to know God. And it is *inability* that Echeverria finds untenable. He finds this to be so because, if true, it would render unbelievers excusable for their unbelief. As he says on p. 92: "If natural theology were religiously undesirable and epistemically flawed, then, as Terrance Penelhum says, '[that] would surely provide an unbeliever with rational excuses for rejection... If sinfulness prevents our yielding to God, then we could hide behind our intellectual incapacity not just our sinfulness... In short, if it is indeed human corruption that keeps us from God, it is more likely to be manifested in our refusal to concede the cogency of arguments in faith's support...'. And later he adds: "So reason fails to attain in practice what it could attain in principle; it fails, says the pope, 'to recognize God as Creator of all,... not because [it lacks] the means to do so, [but] because... sinfulness [places] an impediment in the way'" (p. 93). On this view, reason may be wounded and weakened by nonrational factors in its search for truth, but is not lacking in its own ability to come to the truth of God's reality.

Before dealing with this claim, I must point out that these comments also rest on missing the biblical teaching about the human "heart" as the central unity of a person. If, as scripture asserts, the heart is the source of emotion, desire, will, and "all the issues of life" including our power to know and believe, then the fall of the human heart into rebellion against God must have taken reason with it. There could then be no ground for exempting reason from that fallen condition and insisting that it is only other faculties of human nature that have fallen and which therefore interfere with reason so that it *may* fail "to recognize God as Creator of all...". Although I find this point all by itself to be a powerful objection to the TSC, the position that the unregenerate are unable to arrive at

⁵ The main reason Christians have shied away from affirming the self-evidency of the biblical message to the enlightened heart is that philosophers have long stipulated conditions for genuine self-evidency that rule out belief in God. Aristotle insisted (without argument) that to be genuinely self-evident a belief must be both a necessary truth and infallible, while Descartes and Locke added that it must also be accepted by every rational person. I have critiqued these stipulated conditions and found them all to be utterly indefensible in chapter 3 of *Knowing with the Heart* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

the truth about God does not rest solely on an inference from the biblical doctrine of the human heart. Indeed, the scriptures so often directly assert this inability, that I am quite at a loss to understand how the position expressed by Echeverria in the quotes above could be advocated by anyone familiar with them. Since this is such an important issue, I will take the time to quote just a few of the New Testament's statements on the point.

In I Cor. 2:14 we read: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, *they are folly to him, nor does he have the ability to know them* because they are spiritually discerned." In Ephesians 2:1, St Paul describes those who were once not believers but now know God as having been "made alive when you were dead in trespasses and sins"; later he says (5:8) to these same people that they were "formerly [in] darkness, but now you are light in the Lord". This is important because it is one of a great many places where scripture uses the metaphor of light to stand for truth and knowledge, and the metaphor of darkness to stand for falsehood.⁶ For example, Psalm 36:9 says of God "in your light we see light" and Psalm 43:3 and II Cor 4:4-6 make clear that "light" stands for truth. So it is significant that in the prophets and the New Testament the unbelieving are said to be, with respect to the light of the gospel, "blind". For example, John 12:39-40 says that the unbelieving "*could not believe*" because of the blindness of the eyes of their hearts, and Rom. 11:7-10 says that "The elect obtained [God's grace] but the rest were blinded, as it is written, "God gave then a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear..." II Cor 4:4 is as clear as anything one could wish on the point: "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel...", while v. 6 adds that those who do believe are those for whom "God... has shone in our hearts the light to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Consider Jesus' own words in John 6:44: "No man comes to me unless the Father who sent me drags him." And his words from John 12:40 express the same point when he says of those who do not believe him: "Therefore they *could not believe*". He then quotes Isaiah: "He (God) has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn to me to heal them." The metaphors of light/sight for truth/knowledge and darkness/blindness for unbelief are continued in I John 2:9-11: "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light...but he who hates his brother...does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

I won't go on listing or quoting more scriptures, though it could easily be done. Surely these are more than sufficient to establish not only the contrast between the TSC position and that of the CT, but the untenability of the former. As Echeverria points out, the TSC says that human reason: "...of itself, operating by its own principles, concepts, and criteria can lead to a knowledge both of God's existence and of the world's dependence on Him as its Creator. There are truths... knowable about God's existence and nature without the light of faith and divine revelation" (p.79). It affirms that there are, as well, other truths from which "...the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith, one which can lead to the acceptance of revelation

⁶ For example, Job 12:25, 18:5, 24:13 & 16, 33:30; Ps. 27:1, 36:9, 112:4, 118:27, 119:105 & 130; Prov. 6:23; Is 2:5, 8:20, 9:2, 42:6, 58:8, 59:9, 60:1-3; Is. 6:10; Luke 2:32; Jn 3:21, 11:9&10, Rom 2:17-20.

without in any way compromising the principles and autonomy of the mind itself” (p.80). And these assertions are placed squarely on the ground that “...God created [the mind’s] powers with an orientation to truth as their purpose...” (p.80). Thus there can be no mistaking the claim that the original creational purpose of the mind’s powers was not subverted by the Fall. To this is added the admission that, of course, other factors can and do hinder reason in its quest for truth. But these are said to be factors external to reason itself: “...the inconstancy of the heart often obscure[s] and distort[s] a person’s search. Truth can also drown in a welter of other concerns” (p.80). Thus “ ‘If human beings with their intelligence fail to recognize God as Creator of all, it is not because they lack the means to do so, but because their free will and their sinfulness place an impediment in the way’ ” (p.81). In this sense reason is “wounded and weakened by sin” (p.81). Nevertheless, we are assured that, “ ‘No darkness of error or of sin can totally take away from man the light of God the Creator’ ” (p.83). These, and many other passages in subsequent pages, repeatedly use the expressions “wounded” and “weakened” to describe the effects of (the rest of) fallen human nature on unfallen reason. In fact, on p.84 Echeverria uses them to sum up his position: “Thus, I ask once again, is it not enough that ‘human reason is wounded and weakened by sin’ (FR, no.51)? Could a Calvinist ask for more?”

The answer can only be “yes”. One need only review the Bible texts cited above to see the sharp difference between them and the TSC. Whereas the TSC says reason is “wounded” and “weakened” but has “of itself the means to know God”, the Bible writers say our hearts and minds are “dead”, and “darkened” so that we are “unable” to know God and “cannot believe” in him. Whereas the papal encyclical speaks of the effects of sin as including that “The eyes of the mind were no longer able to see clearly...” (p.84), the New Testament writers repeat that sin has rendered the unregenerate “blind” with respect to God. It is precisely because of these texts that Calvin says:

We must now explain what the power of human reason is in regard to the knowledge of God, the knowledge of his Paternal favor toward us... and the method of regulating our conduct in accordance with Divine Law. With regard to the first two, but especially the second, men otherwise the most ingenious are blinder than moles. (*Inst.* II, ii,18)

But even if the CT has gotten the biblical position right on this point, what is to be said in reply to the point made by Penelhum which Echeverria quotes with approval? Is it the case that the prima facie position of the Bible writers would render humans excusable for their unbelief? In this connection the passage in Romans 1:19-25 seems to me crucially important. There St Paul is speaking specifically of the Fall, of the subsequent human resistance to the truth about God (which he elsewhere says results in “blindness” with respect to that truth), and of the fact that humans are nevertheless still inexcusable. He says both that God created the world so that it points to himself and that God made himself known by special revelation from the beginning of the human race. But, he adds - in a clear reference to the Fall - humans then became “futile in their *thinking* and their

heart was *without understanding*" (v.21). He then goes on to describe that change this way: "...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." (v. 25). This is therefore a fuller account of what he'd described in v.18 as the post-Fall "resistance" to the truth, now common to humans as the root source of their "ungodliness" and "wickedness".

Contained here is the key, I think, to understanding the sense in which it is true both that post-Fall humans *cannot* understand or believe in God and that they are still without excuse. For Paul here emphasizes a point sorely missing from the TSC, namely, that fallen humans do not merely fail to believe in God but that they do so *because they put a false god in His place*. Since this takes place within the human heart (in the biblical sense), it takes with it the intellect, will, and affections. So while the intellect cannot see the truth because its false belief in a God-surrogate blocks the acquisition of the knowledge of the true God, it is simultaneously the case that the fallen will wants that false god, while the fallen affections are in love with it. Moreover, this resistance takes place within the setting of the creation that God made to witness to himself, and simultaneously flies in the face of God's special self-revelation. Objectively, then, there is before each person all that would be needed to know God so that all are without excuse. Subjectively, however, the corrupted human condition resists both the witness of creation and the special revelation of God. And this condition is born out of the rebellion of the human heart. It is important here to bear in mind the nature of the original sin. It was more than mere pride in the ordinary sense. The temptation was *to become divine* (Gen. 3:5). And it is precisely by regarding something of the creation as divine rather than the transcendent Creator, that humans can deceive themselves into thinking they too are (at least partly) divine. For whatever part or aspect of creation is taken to be divine is also a part or aspect of humans. We are thus inexcusable though unable, for our inability is the result of our determination to be divine. And for that we are without excuse.

Since it is the working of the intellect that is at stake in "Fides et Ratio" rather than the will or affections, I will now comment further only on the epistemic side of this fallen condition. To make clearer the sense in which we both cannot know God and are inexcusable for that inability, I offer the following analogy to illustrate how the sinful drive to be divine can effect us epistemically. More specifically, it is an illustration of how a false belief can block the acquisition of a true one. It goes like this. Suppose I look out of my office window and see you walking by, when suddenly someone steps up behind you and stabs you. I hear you cry out and see you fall to the ground. My instant reaction is to dial the phone number for emergency help and rush out to give you aid. But should I attend a magic show at which you volunteer to go on stage, and I subsequently see the same sequence of events (you are stabbed, you cry out, you fall to the floor) I sit and take no action. In fact, I probably applaud the skit along with everyone else *because I've already formed the belief that whatever I see is not real but only part of the show*. So if the magician had a long-standing grudge against you and had decided to kill you on stage, I would fail to form the beliefs I would have otherwise formed despite the fact that I've been confronted with the exact same events. Given the same set of experiences, I do not form the same set of beliefs or take the same actions because they are blocked by a false belief. To complete the analogy, let's suppose that I also believe that I will become

rich if this show is successful. My desire for wealth thus helps blind me to cues that might otherwise have overturned my false belief that the events I'm witnessing are pretense (I see you bleed, hear you yell for help, etc).⁷

In an analogous way, I take Romans 1 to be telling us that our inability and blindness to the true God is the result of our deep and sinful belief in, desire for, and love of being divine. As Calvin says, "Were it not for sin the world would look to all like God's creation and his Word look like his Word." And this, again, is in keeping with the Scriptural use of "sin". It is not primarily a moral idea, but a *religious* one. The primary sense of "sin" is that it is a perversion of our innate religious disposition. That is to say, our "natural", post-fall, state is one in which our religious impulse is bent toward rejecting God and replacing him with a false divinity. The moral sense of "sin" is derivative of this, according to scripture. We fail to love our neighbor as ourselves *because* we fail to love God with all our heart. In contrast to this, it strikes me as anemic in the extreme to suggest that it is because of the "inconstancy of the heart" (understood as emotions) or because the search for truth gets lost "in a welter of other concerns", that we fail to believe/desire/love *God* rather than some God-substitute. Such a view completely fails to capture the depth of the biblical position and the seriousness of sin. It fails to recognize that we have a stake in our own blindness, namely, our innate desire for a religious belief that will allow us to perpetuate the illusion that we are divine. Even less convincing is the suggestion that our rejection of God is due to our free will (p.81). What has that got to do with it? We are free to act on our beliefs and desires, yes. But that freedom is not what makes those beliefs and desires misdirected to a false god rather than the true God. Did not Jesus Christ have free will but was he not perfect in faith and without sin? Will we not all still have free will in heaven when we are made over so as to be, like him, without sin? No Bible writer ever comes within miles of suggesting that our freedom is the reason we reject God and fail to love our neighbor; but they insist over and over that it is due to the corruption of our *heart*, and so of our entire nature, that we do so.

One or two final points. In the course of insisting that reason "unaided by revelation" can provide a rational justification of belief in God, Echeverria quotes the papal encyclical as follows: "Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so runs the risk of no longer being a universal proposition"⁸ (p.88). And later (p.96) he offers another quote disparaging experience as the ground of belief in God compared with reason: "there are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than which are acquired by way of personal verification." I find these comments to be strange and misguided with respect to experience as the ground for belief in God. First, they're strange because of the way the New Testament speaks of belief in God as a product of the work of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of the Spirit's "enlightening" our hearts, removing our "blindness", and of "turning" us to God. Surely these are *experiences* on the part of the recipients of such activities of grace. Second, it is

⁷ As with all analogies, this one too has its limitations. So the language here about our "desire to be divine" should not be taken to suggest that desire, as over against intellect or emotion, is the real seat of sin. They are all varied expressions of the same fallen nature seated in the one common source the scripture calls the "heart".

⁸ It should be noted that in context "universal" here doesn't mean "universally quantified", but "deserving of universal acceptance" (cmp. "Fides et Ratio", p. 77).

misguided to suppose that there is something weak or epistemically deficient about the experience of being enlightened so as to see directly the truth of the gospel. Why would believing in God on the ground of experiencing his word to be his word render that belief “no longer a universal proposition”? Consider the following analogies. What other ground than experience is there for believing there are objects around us? What other ground is there for believing the principle of non-contradiction, or that $1 + 1 = 2$, or that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other? These are not the same *sorts* of experiences, to be sure. One sort uses the senses while the others are grasped as rational intuitions. But what can be the reason for denying that they are all experiences? Isn’t my “seeing” the truth of an axiom an experience? If so, surely there can be no better ground for any belief than direct experience! Once again, Calvin puts the point well:

...those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly to scripture...[so] we ask not for proofs or probabilities on which to rest our judgment, but we subject our intellect and judgment to it...Such then is the conviction that asks not for reasons; *such a knowledge accords with the highest reason, namely, knowledge in which the mind rests more firmly and securely than in any reasons...* I say nothing more than every believer *experiences* in himself... (*Inst.* I, vii,5, italics added)

To make matters worse, the second of the quotes from the encyclical that disparage experience is made in the context of the claim that we can be justified in holding beliefs that are grounded in the experience reports of others, even though we ourselves lack the experience that justifies their belief (p.95). Echeverria applies the point this way: “So it is entirely reasonable for the great majority of people to believe in God, not by engaging in philosophical proofs, but by relying on testimony, by trusting the word of another” (p.96). My objection here is not that his point about the experience reports of others is, in general, false. On the contrary, I think it an epistemologically defensible position that we can acquire genuine knowledge by being told of the experiences of others. The question is whether this is an appropriate and adequate ground for belief in *God*. Is my belief in God “reasonable” (justified) because I take the word of my parents, of a professor, of the church, or of the authors of the biblical writings? Given what we’ve already seen of the New Testament account of why and how people come to belief in God, the only answer can be: surely not. How I learn of a truth is not the same as the ground on which I hold it to be true. I may be ever so grateful to those from whom I learn a truth, and those who pass on to me reports of experiences I lack may be indispensable to my coming to know what they report to me. But so long as they are fallible human beings the simple fact that they told it to me is no guarantee that it’s true. Once again: according to the New Testament, it is the opening of one’s heart to the biblical message by God’s Spirit that results in one “seeing” that message as the truth about God from God. In other words, we trust the messengers of the gospel because we have been enlightened to see the gospel as the truth and thus believe God to have superintended and preserved the recording of the covenant events they report. We do not

believe the gospel because we have independent evidence that the messengers themselves can guarantee the truth of their message. So I find it simply wrong that Echeverria endorses the papal encyclical when it says about belief in God: “Such a truth ... is attained not only by way of [demonstrative] reason but also through trusting acquiescence to other persons who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself” (p.95).

Over against that account, the New Testament’s teaching stands in stark contrast. It repeats again and again that people believe in God because the Spirit of God takes away the blindness of their hearts so that the light of the gospel replaces the darkness of their former, false, religious belief. It insists that the experience of seeing the biblical message to be the truth about God from God is the reason people come to believe it, and it never speaks as though anyone should believe revealed truth merely on the say-so of those to whom God revealed it. Everywhere and only, Bible writers speak of believers as those who see for themselves that the message being passed on is the truth, and it is only sheer confusion that later (p.96) Echeverria shifts his endorsement of this point as though he had been speaking of our taking *God’s* testimony for what is to be believed! Of course “anyone is surer of what he hears from the infallible God than of what he sees with his own fallible reason”. What Christian would deny that? But that was not the question. The question was how we can be sure that the biblical message is in fact God’s testimony.

Finally, let me make it clear that although I side with the CT in taking human reason to have fallen so that it cannot of its own power discover and believe in God, this is not to assert that discursive reasoning is totally irrelevant to religion. It is by this use of reason that humans understand the gospel to begin with, even if it inevitably looks false to the unregenerate mind. Moreover, those whose hearts and minds have been redeemed may surely use reasoning to defend the biblical message from attack and criticism. This is a distinction that is missed repeatedly in “Fides et Ratio”. For example, Dooyeweerd is criticized (p.91) on the ground that he “...denies that faith needs reason as a support and source of theological truth...”. This then called a “troubling point” because it is supposed to entail reason’s “impotence in understanding truths about God”. But clearly there is no such entailment. How would reason’s not being able to prove the existence of God and not being a source of theological truths show that it can’t so much as understand the words of the gospel? Surely understanding the gospel is a precondition for discussing it with unbelievers and using reasoning and argument to defend it from attack. And Calvin and Dooyeweerd agree that discussing it and defending it are both possible and desirable, though neither will of itself produce belief in God. As Calvin puts it;

It is true... that if we choose to proceed in the way of argument, it is easy to establish... that if there is a God in heaven, the Law, the Prophecies, and the gospel proceeded from him... But although we may defend the Sacred Word of God against gainsayers, it does not follow that we shall forthwith implant the certainty which faith requires in their hearts. (*Inst.* I,vii,4)

II. DOOYEWEERD ON FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

Since the biblical meaning of the term “heart” goes unrecognized in “Fides et Ratio”, it is not surprising that what Dooyeweerd says about the knowledge of God as a direct, experiential, apprehension of the heart is also misunderstood. Thus, after calling Dooyeweerd a “rational fideist”, Echeverria repeats (p.90) that without “rational justification” there is only “blind commitment”. He then goes on to accuse Dooyeweerd of the false dichotomy that faith is either commitment to God himself or assent to doctrines expressed in propositions, but not both (p.91). This, he says, is because Dooyeweerd insists that “propositional knowledge is completely absent from ‘heart knowledge’” (p. 90 note 36). And he offers as an objection to this point the fact that whenever Dooyeweerd speaks of the consequences of heart knowledge he does so in propositions that are presented as true. Likewise, he also finds a confusion in Dooyeweerd’s distinction between faith and theology. Once again, says Echeverria, Dooyeweerd is inconsistent because he says both that faith as heart knowledge transcends all theological concepts, while his own description of the contents of the Faith include a number of doctrines such as of creation, fall, redemption, etc. So he asks of that list: “Is this theological or what?”

The most puzzling thing about this criticism is that it cites the *New Critique I*, 516-517 as evidence for Dooyeweerd’s rejection of the TSC’s notion of faith as intellectual assent to propositions. For on those pages, and others surrounding them, Dooyeweerd gives a fairly extensive account of what he means by heart knowledge. And those pages make clear that his objection to the TSC’s definition of faith is not that it “limits” it to intellectual assent, as Echeverria says, but that it misses altogether what heart knowledge *is*. For Dooyeweerd, heart knowledge is - as Echeverria recognizes - personal commitment to God. And in that sense it is, indeed, not propositional. But that commitment is not, as Echeverria seems to suppose, merely a matter of emotions or affections. Rather, it is the experience of encountering the Spirit of God, which encounter renews and restores our affections, wills, *and intellects* (including our divinity-intuitions) to proper working order. It does this by removing the blindness from our hearts, which removal is the precondition for the act of trust (*fides qua*) which embraces the doctrine(s) revealed (*fides quae*) as truth(s) from God. Saying that this experience itself does not contain propositions, or is not in the first place a matter of assenting to propositions, does not at all deny that it is the very experience which makes it possible for anyone to believe the propositions that express revealed truths. Nor is it to deny that those beliefs, once formed, have an intellectual component as well as an emotive and a volitional component. Dooyeweerd’s objection to the TSC, then, is the same as Calvin’s: intellectual assent doesn’t *define* belief in God although it is one result of it. The confusion here is, once again, caused by Echeverria’s failure to recognize Dooyeweerd’s use of “heart”. Echeverria is willing to agree that there is more to faith than intellectual assent in the sense that the heart (as a term for emotions) can also come into play once the assent is given. And with respect to that point, he thinks the CT has misrepresented the TSC; the TSC, he says, never denied that. But that is not at all what Calvin or Dooyeweerd intend by “heart”, as should be clear by now. As the unity of the human self

which is the seat of one's nature and the source of all one's powers and acts, the heart cannot be identified with (limited to) any of them. That is why Dooyeweerd says of the religious impulse implanted in the heart:

There is one thing, however, on which we cannot lay too much stress. As the absolutely central sphere of human existence, religion transcends all...aspects of ...reality, the aspect of faith included.... It is the ex-sistent condition in which the ego is bound to its true or pretended firm ground. (*NC I*, 57-58)

In other words, in its most basic sense, religion is the *condition* of the human heart (self) in which it stands captured by whatever it experiences to be divine. And that *condition* is the cause of the *acts* of belief and trust that arise in consequence. That is the sense in which heart knowledge precedes intellectual assent, propositions, and theology: not temporally but causally, as their precondition. And that is why the most basic sense of religious belief cannot be identified with any specific act of trust, feeling of confidence, or assent of the intellect. But it is also why it is completely false to say that Dooyeweerd denies that faith includes belief in specific revealed truths expressed in propositions.

These same reasons are why all the objections Echeverria lodges against Dooyeweerd's idea of faith expressed in terms of what I have called the "fiduciary" (pistical) aspect of experience, also fail. They simply miss the distinctions Dooyeweerd draws between: 1) the religious disposition of the heart, 2) wholehearted belief and trust in God, 3) believing that scripture is revelation from God, 4) and belief in specific doctrines that have been revealed (*Cmp. N.C. II*, 562-564).

III. DOOYEWEERD'S PERSPECTIVALISM

In this section we leave behind the issues common to the entire CT, and focus on Dooyeweerd's thought specifically. I will begin with Echeverria's (correct) report that Dooyeweerd adds to Calvin's reasons for rejecting natural theology his own argument to the effect that theoretical thinking cannot ever be religiously neutral. He says:

Dooyeweerd argues that a non-question begging rational justification for one's religious perspective is unavailable, and this is because of the very nature of theorizing. Yet, he rejects the inference that a relativism of truth follows from the diverse ultimate starting points for intellectual inquiry, but also the implication that argument is pointless. Although this is true, it is hard to see why Dooyeweerd's position resists the implications of hard perspectivalism... his position seems self-referentially inconsistent. (p.89)

Self-referential incoherence is the fallacy that afflicts any position that claims *all* knowledge or belief is determined by (is the product of) some factor that compels us to believe so that the resulting beliefs fail to be normative judgments. The incoherency lies in the fact that if such a claim were true, then the claim itself would have to be the product of that same all-determining factor. Thus, even if the claim were true, no one could ever know it to be true. For example, Freud once said that all beliefs are the products of our unconscious emotional desires. But even if that were true, it would require Freud's belief in it to be nothing more than the product of *his* unconscious desire to think so. In that case, the most he could claim is that, given his unconscious desires, he can't help believing it is true; but he could never claim to have good reasons to know it. This is the fallacy Echeverria suggests Dooyeweerd commits. He says that since Dooyeweerd holds that theories are all regulated by some religious perspective, his claim makes the same mistake. So we need to see whether Dooyeweerd's position really is the "hard perspectivalist" claim that all beliefs are determined by one's religious perspective. Is it truly self-referentially incoherent because it makes an "all" claim that includes itself?

The first thing to be noticed about Dooyeweerd's claim is that it is asserted mainly with respect to theories. It is *hypotheses* which he claims cannot avoid being regulated by some divinity belief. The first reason he holds this is that it follows from a revealed truth, namely, the biblical doctrine of the heart. If the heart is always in the grip of either the true God or a false God-surrogate, then all the functions of the heart will manifest that religious orientation.⁹ That is why he calls his discovery of that doctrine "the great turning point in my thought" which called for "a revolution in philosophical thought of a very radical character" (*N.C.*, Forward to the First Edition). His second reason is also a revealed truth, namely, the biblical teaching that all truth and every sort of knowledge are impacted by knowing God. Since this is a point that seems to be completely overlooked by the TSC, I will - once more - take the time to review some of the texts which assert it.

In Ps. 111:10, Prov. 1:7, 9:10, 15:33; and Jer. 8:9, there are assertions to the effect that the knowledge of God is the foundation ("principle part") of all wisdom and knowledge. Since these statements are found in poetic works, however, they are open to being dismissed as hyperbole. But in Luke 11:52, Jesus denounces the interpreters of the Law for distorting it and adds that they have thereby "taken away the key to knowledge". Notice that he doesn't say "the key to the knowledge of God", but just "knowledge". Someone might, of course, reply that the expression is elliptical and that he meant only the knowledge of God. But that does not appear to be the case when his remark is compared with such statements as the one found in I Cor. 1:5. There we are told that by knowing God through Christ we are "enriched" in "*all wisdom and knowledge*". This text doesn't specify just how all knowledge is enriched by the knowledge of God, but it doesn't sound like poetic hyperbole either. It sounds as though it means that all

⁹ A. Kuyper had made the same point: "Especially the leading thought which we have formed in that realm of life which holds our chiefest interest exercises a mighty domain upon the whole of our consciousness, viz. our religious views...If, then, we make a mistake...how can it fail to communicate itself disastrously to our entire scientific study?...it follows that the knowledge of the cosmos as a whole...philosophy...is equally bound to founder upon...sin." *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*. (New York: Scribners Sons, 1898) 109 - 113.

knowledge is (somehow) favorably impacted by knowing God. It comports perfectly, then, with Ps. 36:9 which, in addressing God, asserts that “in your light we see light”. Recalling what we saw earlier about the metaphor of light for truth, this amounts to saying that the truth about God (somehow) impacts the acquisition of truth generally. Eph. 5:9 also uses the light metaphor to affirm that the “fruit” (consequences) of the light of the gospel is found in “*all* that is good and just and *true*”, and Col 2:3 says that by knowing Christ we have access to “all the treasures of wisdom and *knowledge*”. What is more, the context of this latter remark places it in deliberate opposition to the false philosophy of the time that explained the cosmos as dependent on the elements (earth, air, fire, water) rather than on Christ, who is its true explanation because he is the pre-existent one “by whom all things cohere”.

But having taken note of the revealed grounds of Dooyeweerd’s claim does nothing to assuage the accusation of self-referential incoherence with respect to his *arguing* for it. Should he not simply have derived the point from revelation and let it go at that? Isn’t any argument to show that theory-making inevitably presupposes some religious perspective self-defeating because the truth of its premises would have to depend on *its* religious perspective? It is significant that Dooyeweerd raises this objection himself and answers it early in the *New Critique* (I, 56-57). He also reverts to the point in scattered places later in that work. But since citing them all, and piecing them together while explaining his terminology would take too long, I’m going to summarize in my own words why I think this accusation fails.

The first part of the answer to the charge is that it fails because Dooyeweerd doesn’t claim that *all beliefs* are *determined* by a religious perspective. Rather than claim that all (other) beliefs are the *products* of a religious belief, he claims only that some one or another religious belief always importantly impacts *theories*. His own term for this is that theories are always “regulated” - not determined or produced - by one’s religious perspective. And his account of what it means for a theory to be “regulated” by a divinity belief is not strong enough to involve it in self-referential incoherence. It would do so only if he’d claimed that all beliefs are produced by a religious perspective; only then would the claim itself have to be the product of a religious perspective. At the same time, however, the regulative influence he argues for is strong enough to make the case for the non-neutrality of theories, and to show its importance to their understanding. To illustrate what is meant by religious impact without determination, I will offer a simple example that contrasts its minimal involvement in pre-theoretical knowledge with its greater impact on a theory.

If I am sitting at dinner with someone who is a materialist and does not believe in God, and I say “Pass the salt, please”, that person is perfectly able to understand what I mean for a number of reasons. First, the person is as much in the presence of the saltshaker as I am, and his perception is in proper working order. He has formed the belief that there is a saltshaker at his end of the table for the same reason I have, namely, he sees it there. Neither of us forms that belief because of what we hold to be divine, but on the basis of normal sense perception. Moreover, that perception - as Dooyeweerd would remind us - is not wholly *sensory* in character. It includes the logical distinguish-

ing of properties of many different (aspectual) kinds exhibited by the saltshaker. These are combined by each of us into a concept of that saltshaker in such a way that there is a large overlap between my concept of the saltshaker and my tablemate's concept, an overlap sufficient for each of us to be sure we're speaking about the same object. At this level of experience and thought, therefore, no religious issue arises. Of course, if we were to begin to discuss the nature of the world around us, we would soon enough find out that while I believe all the kinds of properties and laws true of the world around us - including those of the saltshaker - to be creations of God, he believes them all to be identical with or dependent on some exclusively physical reality. In the final analysis, then, there is a religious difference in the content of our two concepts of the saltshaker only when those concepts are extended well beyond their usual parameters. This difference rarely surfaces, however, and thus makes no practical difference at the table in so far as conveying salt to our food is concerned.

Theoretical thinking also begins with our common experience of "undeniable states of affairs". It, too, is based on our perceptions of the world around us, the perception reports of others, and the recognition that the objects of our experience exhibit properties of different kinds each of which has its own law-order. It's on this basis that we form beliefs about what we experience, and also form the questions that cannot be answered simply by more experience. It is to answer the latter that we propose the educated guesses we call hypotheses. So far as the sciences are concerned, these proposals are formulated in the context of some one or another of the *kinds* of properties and laws we have abstracted for investigation. So we have theories focussed on the quantitative, physical, biotic, sensory, economic, etc., aspects of the world we experience. This is why the entities (objects, functions, patterns, relations, laws, etc.) we propose to fill explanatory gaps in our knowledge correspond in kind to the kind of properties and laws that form the aspectual domain of the science in which they are proposed. The role of religious belief in forming the concepts of such hypotheses, Dooyeweerd holds, is more prominent and unavoidable. But it is not the case that a thinker's religious belief alone *produces* the postulates of theories. What it does instead is delimit a certain range of hypotheses that will be acceptable from a particular religious perspective. Thus it also simultaneously rules out other ranges of possible explanatory postulates that are incompatible with that perspective. But even this doesn't rigidly determine the hypotheses formed from the perspective; what is delimited is a wide *range* of possibilities the actual selection from which is under-determined by the perspective itself. Taken in this way, there is nothing about this claim which, if true, would make it impossible for any thinker not sharing Dooyeweerd's perspective to notice that this is what's going on once it's pointed out. The claim itself is not the *product* of the biblical perspective for theories in any stronger sense than that revealed truth led us to look for it and that we welcome it once we find it confirmed, rather than try to find some means to explain it away.

This preliminary point is not the whole story, however. The delimitation of acceptable hypotheses is not only a matter of setting a certain range for them, but also explicitly affects their conceptual content. This more thorough-going impact has to do with the way the concepts are interpreted depending upon what religious perspective is

presupposed. Here we must keep in mind that in speaking of the religious regulation of concepts, we mean the way they are affected by *whatever a thinker takes to have absolute (divine) reality*. In that connection, the concept of a pretheoretically experienced object such as a saltshaker was little affected unless its concept was extended significantly. By contrast, the concept of an abstract hypothetical entity is radically different owing to what religious belief is presupposed. For whenever absolute reality is identified with any aspect(s) of creation, the resulting religious perspective requires that the ultimate nature of any postulated entity be the same as that of the (putative) absolute reality.¹⁰ In that way the perspective requires a specific *nature* for theoretical entities, even though it doesn't force any particular postulate on a thinker with that presupposition. Thus my materialist tablemate and I might agree that the saltshaker is beautiful or overpriced at the pre-theoretical level of experience. But in relation to his materialist theory of reality, he will be forced either to deny that there really are aesthetic or economic properties and norms which are true of the saltshaker or to explain the existence of such properties and norms as generated (not merely occasioned) by its physical properties. The religious regulation of the concepts he offers to support those claims is thus a crucial factor in the explanatory power (or lack of it) of those hypotheses. Nevertheless, at the same time, that influence is not all-determining. It is not the case that every belief about every property of every thing is forced on all thinkers by their religious perspective. It is still the case that much of a concept's content is derived from our experience of "undeniable states of affairs".

These are still not the only reasons why Dooyeweerd's account fails to be a self-referentially incoherent hard perspectivalism. For not only is the sort of influence he attributes to religious belief not all-determining, but neither is the type of defense he offers for it self-defeating. This is because the argument Dooyeweerd gives for this point consists of a *description* of the activity of high abstraction that is necessary to forming any hypothesis. In other words, the defense he offers of this point is not itself a theory.¹¹ Rather, he simply points to the way abstract thinking operates and to why that requires scientific and philosophical hypotheses both to presuppose some divinity belief and to differ relative to whatever divinity they presuppose. So if this is to be called an "argument" at all, it must be recognized that it is one which neither proposes any hypotheses nor lays down any premises. It does not take the form of a deductive or inductive proof in which some premises are defended as unavoidable, reasonable, or probable, and from which conclusions are then inferred. Instead, he simply describes (at least part of) what goes on in the act of abstraction, and asks his readers to confirm in their own self-reflection whether they catch themselves doing what he has described. If so, they will have seen for themselves excellent reasons for the two main points he is defending: 1) every theory of reality must propose something as the absolute reality that which makes all else possible (that, of course, will either be God or something created

¹⁰ There are instances of exceptions to this, but they aren't serious for the point. The reason is that whenever a theory postulates entities whose natures are different from that of the reality they presuppose to be absolute, the explanatory power of those entities is always relativized to others whose natures are the same as the absolute reality.

¹¹ As Dooyeweerd confirmed to me in conversation, the distinction between pretheoretical and highly abstract thought is itself a pretheoretical one. Making it does not even require the isolation of properties characteristic of high abstraction, let alone require any hypothesis.

which is put into the place of God); 2) every claim identifying the absolute with some aspect of creation is incapable of being justified in the way hypotheses need to be justified, but instead bears all the hallmarks of religious belief.

So is this description of abstraction offered by Dooyeweerd also influenced by his own religious belief? He answers: “It is of course impossible that this transcendental criticism...itself should be unprejudiced. For in that case it would refute its own conclusions” (*N.C. I*, 56). But since the description is not a hypothesis, the impact of belief in God on it is not such that it will appear a correct description only to those who believe in God - any more than a description of the saltshaker will appear true only to those who share the same divinity belief. As we have already seen, the influence of Dooyeweerd’s belief in God is, in this instance, primarily a matter of its affording him access to the revealed truth that thinking, too, is under religious influence. And this, he admits, made him more likely to notice the way the structure of abstract thought exhibits that influence. Consider a parallel case. Aristotle regarded the rational order of the cosmos as having absolute reality.¹² This conviction surely served to focus his attention on the logical order of the world and make him more sensitive to it. In this way it may well have been a contributing factor to his being able to formulate the law of noncontradiction. But does that mean one must be a rationalist in order to see the truth of the law of noncontradiction? Must one deify it, as Aristotle did, in order to believe it at all? Surely not. Ever since it was formulated, millions of people with widely divergent religious beliefs have been able to see the truth of that law. Their religious beliefs have inspired different *interpretations* of it, to be sure. Some have held that there are exceptions to it so that certain self-contradictory beliefs are nevertheless true (Hegel, Marx); others have held that while it applies to our everyday experience it doesn’t hold for the sub-atomic realm (Heisenberg); still others admit that it is a law of our thought but deny we can know it holds for extra-mental reality (Logical Positivists). So although the law gets interpreted in accordance with the regulating influence of whatever religious belief a thinker may hold, that doesn’t prevent the truth of the law from being recognized.

In the same way, I think the truth of Dooyeweerd’s description of the act and consequences of abstraction can be recognized by everyone no matter what divinity belief regulates their thinking. They may, of course, then propose a theory that attempts to explain away or at least mitigate the consequences of his description of that “structure of theoretical thought”. But as he points out, an analysis of any theory proposed to explain this away will show that it too presupposes some idea of divinity: “If, as we have demonstrated, theoretical synthesis is *possible* only from a supra-theoretical starting point [religious belief], then only the *contents* of the supra-theoretical presuppositions implied thereby can be questionable, but not the very necessity of them” (*N.C. I*, 56).

Finally, we need to notice that Dooyeweerd also admits that there is no way to prove that the supra-theoretical presuppositions that guide theory making are *religious*. It is clear that these presuppositions all regard something as having absolute (independent)

¹² *Metaphysics* 1064a34, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1941), 861.

reality, but it isn't possible, he says, to prove that is the same as having a religious belief (N.C. I, 56-57, 59). So although there is powerful evidence that absolute (non-dependent) reality is the defining element in all religious belief,¹³ if someone is bent on rejecting that definition there is no argument to show it must be accepted on pain of self-contradiction.

In the light of all this, why should we think that either Dooyeweerd's claim or his defense of the claim about the non-neutrality of theories is self-canceling? We have now seen that: he doesn't claim that all beliefs are wholly the *products* of a religious perspective; his defense of the claim does not depend on high abstraction or make use of any hypothesis; his defense is in the form of a thought experiment to be confirmed in the self-reflection of every reader; and, finally, he does not suppose that everyone who performs the experiment will be compelled to agree that theories are all religiously regulated. Rather, he thinks only that everyone would have to admit that the alleged neutrality of theories is not unproblematic and cannot simply be assumed. As Dooyeweerd himself puts it, his critique has thus:

...laid bare structural states of affairs which had been ignored under the very influence of the dogma as to the autonomy of theoretical reason. However, these states of affairs, once they have been discovered, may no longer be ignored by anyone who appreciates a veritably critical attitude in philosophy... Hitherto, however, the demonstrative force of this critique has been *negative* in character, so far as it, taken strictly, can only demonstrate, that the starting point of theoretical thought cannot be found in that thought itself, but must be supra-theoretical in character. (N.C. I, 56-57)

One might wish to call such a position soft-perspectivalism, but it surely doesn't sound like a hard perspectivalism that incurs self-referential incoherence. So if anyone wishes to insist that this accusation is somehow nevertheless true, it's going to take a much more detailed argument to show that it is. It cannot simply be asserted as Echeverria does.

IV. DOOYEWEERD ON METAPHYSICS, RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE , AND GOD

The three topics of this section title are treated by Echeverria - correctly, I think - as importantly interconnected. His objections to Dooyeweerd's position are: 1) that it rejects metaphysics, 2) that its denial of metaphysics means our language about God cannot be true, and 3) that it holds we can't conceptualize the being of God, which is a self-referentially incoherent claim. In reply I will argue that 1) is based on an equivocation of the term "metaphysics", that 2) is simply false, and 3) that it is not self-

¹³ For an account of the strong case that can be made in favor of this definition of religious belief, see *Knowing with the Heart*, pp. 11-42.

referentially incoherent to hold that God's uncreated Being is beyond the ability of humans to conceptualize.

1) There are at least four ways Echeverria uses the term "metaphysics" in his article without distinguishing them. The first way is as a synonym for realism (p.99). In this sense it is not at all a theory about what is, let alone a theory that holds there is more to reality than what we can experience by perception. It is, rather, an assertion of the correspondence view of truth which says that a statement is true if and only if what it asserts is the case. In this sense Dooyeweerd is not in the least anti-metaphysical.¹⁴ The second way Echeverria uses the term is to connote that there is more to reality than creation. This is exemplified when he says that we can't "make sense of the very idea of God revealing truth without affirming the transcendent and metaphysical dimension of reality" (p.100). In this sense, too, Dooyeweerd is not anti-metaphysical; he certainly believes God to be real and to be distinct from the created universe. Yet a third sense of "metaphysics" employed by Echeverria is that of a philosophical theory about the nature of reality. But this third sense conceals also a fourth, since it could mean a theory of *created* reality or it could mean a theory about *all* reality God included. With respect to the third meaning, Dooyeweerd is once again not anti-metaphysical. In this respect he would completely agree with what Echeverria says of the position of John Paul II, namely, that it calls for a

"Christian philosophy" which is not "an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy"; rather it is a "Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived [and practiced] in dynamic union with faith." There can be no doubt that John Paul desires the Christian faith to illuminate philosophy, to reform it from within and vivify it. (p.98)

But the fourth meaning of "metaphysics", the one according to which metaphysics is a theory that includes the nature of *all* reality God included, is indeed one Dooyeweerd rejects. It is thus the only one of the four senses in which Echeverria uses the term about which it would be accurate to call Dooyeweerd "anti-metaphysical". On that point, however, Dooyeweerd is hardly alone. His position is in agreement with the Orthodox tradition derived from the Cappadocian Fathers, with the theology of Luther and Calvin, and with the view of Karl Barth. Along with all of those thinkers, Dooyeweerd also affirms that the uncreated Being of God is (in a sense to be explained shortly) beyond human ability to conceptualize. So the questions before us are whether Echeverria is right

¹⁴ Echeverria incorrectly reports (p. 99) that Dooyeweerd denies the view that a statement is true if and only if what it asserts is in fact the case, and cites *NC II*, 556 in support. But he misunderstands Dooyeweerd's point. What Dooyeweerd objects to is not the correspondence view of truth, but the TSC's *theory* as to the *nature* of that correspondence and as to what makes the correspondence *possible*. He objects, for example, that explaining the correspondence as holding between reality and the "rational intellect" assumes that knowledge can be accounted for by logical activity alone, when in fact the logical aspect of our thought can only exist and function in connection with all the other aspects of a human being. The ultimate seat of knowledge, therefore, is not the "rational intellect" but the human heart. On Dooyeweerd's view "rational intellect" is a reification of what is really but one function of the heart, while the heart is more than all its functions and is the point at which they all converge to produce knowledge. (*NC II*, 571-573)

in thinking that such a position makes religious language impossible, and whether such a position is self-referentially incoherent.

2) The claim that God's transcendence of human concepts makes true predication of God impossible, is put by Echeverria as follows:

But if the truth about God is really communicated in human words, as Dooyeweerd acknowledges, and divine truth is revealed in truth bearing statements, or propositions, as he inexplicably denies, then human thought can move outside the boundaries of human experience, and God's ontological transcendence does not imply conceptual transcendence. (p.101)

And again:

How can it make sense to say that the revelational meaning of these words transcends every human concept, as Dooyeweerd says? How can he say that no human concepts can be predicated of God's nature because they do not transcend the creaturely limits of the possibility of experience? (p.102)

We have already seen why it is mistaken to report Dooyeweerd as denying that "divine truth is revealed in truth bearing statements". We noted that Dooyeweerd insists only that the most basic sense of "revelation" is not a statement but an encounter with God, an experience of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit. That experience is not identical with recognizing the truth of God's word-revelation, but it certainly doesn't exclude that recognition. On the contrary, the experience of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit is the encounter with the One who is the Truth, which is the pre-condition for recognizing the truths revealed in God's word. Hence it is also not correct to report that Dooyeweerd claims that the meaning of the *words* by which God reveals truth "transcends every human concept". What transcends human concepts, according to Dooyeweerd, isn't the meanings of our words but the uncreated being of God. So the legitimate question here is only this: how can we say anything true of God if God's being transcends our concepts?

As I pointed out above, the answer Dooyeweerd endorses to this question has been around for a long time so it's surprising that Echeverria doesn't review it and tell us why he finds it insufficient. It is an answer that was first given by the Cappadocian Fathers in the 4th century, was rediscovered and reaffirmed by Luther and Calvin in the 16th century, and has been advocated by a number of theologians in the 20th century most notably by Karl Barth. I will begin with the Cappadocian position as expressed in the famous and oft-quoted statement of St Basil: "We do not know what God is, but what he is not and how he relates to creatures." Basil held this in a much more radical sense than many of those who have quoted him, however, since he added that God's essential being is "incomprehensible to reason" not (only) because of sin but due to the fact that we are creatures. In fact, he went so far as to say that "being rational *means* belonging to

creation”.¹⁵ Basil also denied that God’s being is identical with his attributes, and insisted that God’s being prior to creation was “free from qualities altogether”.¹⁶ To this St Gregory Nyssa added that when negative terms are applied to God they signify “the absence of non-inherent qualities rather than the presence of inherent qualities” as they do when used of creatures.¹⁷ The unknowable essence or being of God is, however, distinguished by the Cappadocians from God’s relations to creatures (his “energies”) which *can* be experienced and conceptualized by us. So while they held it true that God possesses every good quality “appropriate to the Deity”, they denied - contra Anselm and Aquinas - that those attributes comprise a nature God has to have in order to be God or that there is any way for us to know what those attributes are aside from his revelation. Rather, said the Cappadocians, they are true of God and able to be revealed to us because “...God both adapts to humanity and speaks in human language.”¹⁸ Even the doctrine of the Trinity, they said, does not tell us what God’s uncreated being is, but is true of God-in-relation-to-us.¹⁹ Thus they held that neither theology nor philosophy may speculate about the being of God. For while we can know the revealed attributes, “the Divine has its being precisely where thought does not reach.”²⁰

Even so brief a survey as this should be enough to show the significant difference between the Orthodox view and the Anselm/Aquinas view of God that Echeverria assumes. For Aquinas, God’s attributes exist necessarily and are not relations God has freely taken on toward creatures. For Anselm, God is *defined* as the being with all and only perfections, so that everything true of God is necessarily true. The being of God, in fact, just *is* the unity of those perfections according to both Anselm and Aquinas. But by adopting that view Aquinas is left without any way to explain how God can have contingent relations to creatures at all. He cannot say, as the Cappadocians did, that God’s relations to us are ones he freely took on and thus constitute his *adaptation* to humans. So he was actually forced to say that the relations between God and creatures are “really in the creatures but not really in God”.²¹ This, of course, is self-contradictory: if there is really a relation between two things, both its members must stand in that relation, and if one of them doesn’t really stand in the relation to the other, neither can the other to the one and no such relation holds between them. Thus it is not true that the Anselm/Aquinas view is unproblematic. For unless God has at least some attributes that are relations that depend on his having assumed them, virtually all the covenant conditions that scripture reveals would be impossible. Echeverria has simply missed the distinction between the unknowable essential being of God and his attributes. On the Orthodox position, the attributes are relations God has to creatures that are real for both God and

¹⁵ J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 51-52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40-42. This point is in support of the view that the unaccommodated being of God had no properties prior to God’s accommodation. For creatures, the denial of a property implies the possession of the complement of that property and were that true of God also it would be impossible for God not to have properties. So Nyssa’s point is that if we deny God is, e.g., static does not imply he is dynamic; God’s unaccommodated being transcends both. (Nor can it be replied that not having properties is itself a property since that would be self-contradictory).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234, 240-241.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216. See also pp. 50-54, 201.

²¹ *S.th.*, VI, 2, b, 1.

creatures, and they are knowable just because they are created properties and are subject to laws of creation. As such, they are the results of God's free grace, not independently existing attributes God cannot help but have and over which he has no control.

There can be little doubt that Luther and Calvin recovered the Orthodox view of God in the sixteenth century. For example, Luther says:

Now God in his nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to deal with him. We have to do with him as clothed by his word, by which he presents himself to us.²²

And again;

We know no other God than the God clothed with his promises...when he is clothed with the voice of a man, when he accommodates himself to our capacity to understand, then I can approach him.²³

Calvin holds the same position. Several times in the *Institutes* he uses the same expression of God being "clothed" in his word. He speaks of the revealed nature by which God has accommodated himself to us as "the nature in which he is pleased to manifest himself", thereby making clear that God's being is not comprised of attributes that necessarily exist and which he necessarily must possess in order to be God. Listen to how like the Cappadocians he sounds in the following:

For how can the human mind...penetrate to a knowledge of the substance of God while unable to understand its own? (*Inst.* I, xiii, 21)

...in the enumeration of his perfections, [God] is revealed not as he is in himself, but in relation to us...every perfection [ascribed to God in scripture] may be contemplated in creation; and hence, such as we feel him to be when experience is our guide, such he declares himself to be in his word. (*Inst.* I,x,2)

What can be known of God's own being aside from his relations accommodated to us, says Calvin, is only "his eternity and self-existence" (*Inst.* I,viii,3) - both apophatic ascriptions as to what God is not.

²² From *The Bondage of the Will* quoted in J. Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961), 191.

²³ P. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 20.

Karl Barth also held this Cappadocian/Reformational view of God's nature. What Luther called God's "accommodation" to us, Barth speaks of as God's "entering into the creaturely form of existence":

When God creates and therefore gives reality to another alongside and outside himself, time begins as the form of existence of this other...it is true that in this sense, in his pure, divine, form of existence, God is not in time but before, above, and after all time... The creature, however, is not eternal but temporal, i.e., in time...to be a creature means to be in this way. But how can there be any possibility or actuality of the intercourse between God and creature...if not by God's graciousness to his creature, his condescension to it, by his entrance into its form of existence...if he does not accept it in such a way that he gives himself to its level... there cannot be any intercourse between God and creature.²⁴

In the light of this history, it should be clear that Dooyeweerd's position on the subject is neither new nor obviously inconsistent as Echeverria seems to think. Like many before him, Dooyeweerd holds that all our concepts are derived from creation so that reason cannot reach to the being of God. Moreover, he draws the same distinction between the (unaccommodated) being and the attributes of God:

...the genuine *conceptual* contents of these...limiting ideas do not transcend the modal dimension of the temporal horizon of experience. The same applies to ... the so-called attributes of God...they are taken from experience and existence as related to God as its absolute Origin...[hence they] cannot be ascribed to God's being as its properties, since they are of creaturely character... this implies that they should not be separately called absolute, or be identified with God's absolute being.²⁵

There is more to this quote than the point I'm making just now, so I'll return to the first part of it later. For now we need only notice how, technical jargon aside, it makes the same distinction that Calvin expressed between God's essence and his perfections (attributes) which he calls God's "works":

The Lord is manifested by his perfections...Hence it is obvious that, in seeking God, the most direct path

²⁴ *Church Dogmatics*. (Edinburgh: T.T.Clark, 1964), vol. III part 1, sect 41.

²⁵ "Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought" in *Jerusalem and Athens*, Ed. E. R. Geehan (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), 86-88. See also *N.C.* II, 560-562.

...is not to attempt with presumptuous curiosity to pry into his essence...but to contemplate him in his works by which he draws near, becomes familiar, and in a manner communicates himself to us. (*Inst.* I, v, 9)

It must therefore be acknowledged that in each of the works of God, and more especially in the whole of them taken together, the divine perfections are delineated as in a picture, and the whole human race invited...to acquire the knowledge of God. (*Inst.* I, v, 10)

But the mere fact that this is a longstanding position with many advocates does not answer the objections Echeverria has posed to it. The first of those objections - that properties cannot be truly predicated of God if they are not true of God's being - has really already been answered. On the Cappadocian/Reformational view, religious language is possible because the attributes ascribed to God are properties he really has, even though they're not ones he must have in order to be God. Instead of taking the divine attributes as perfections which exist necessarily and taking the being of God to be the unity of those perfections, they are taken instead as relational and as comprising the "nature in which he is pleased to manifest himself". So it is both true that we have no concept of God's uncreated being, and true that we can have concepts of the relations in which God stands to us. In fact, for that very reason, not only is language about God possible but it reveals univocal truth about God. Remember that God's accommodation to us is not merely verbal; it does not consist only of the way God *speaks* about himself. Rather, God first anthropomorphized *himself* and over the ages gradually revealed to humans the nature which is his accommodation of himself to them. (Recall the earlier quote from St Gregory Nyssa: "God both adapts to humanity and speaks in human language".)

This position therefore allows a different view of religious language from that of the analogical theory. Just because the attributes of God are relations he freely took on, and since they are all qualified by characteristics drawn from creation, the terms used of God can be taken as ordinary language. This means that they convey just what we usually mean by "good", "just", "merciful", or "angry", etc. But because these properties are ones God has freely taken on, we must be told by revelation the extent and precise sense in which each is true of him. We are not entitled to suppose that he has - let alone *must have* - the maximally perfect degree of each. Of course, the Cappadocian/ Reformational view can agree that God possesses goodness, mercy, justice, etc., in a degree greater than any human can. But it can do this without thereby subscribing to the hypothesis that each of these attributes is to be thought of as the highest possible degree of a great-making property. They are not baptized citizens of Plato's barnyard. But there is no loss to their significance on that account, for it is not the greater of degree of such properties that chiefly distinguishes them when they're used of God. Rather than be forced to hold that God's attributes exist in an infinite mode unknowable to humans, the Cappadocian/ Reformational position can say instead that the important difference for terms applied to God is not the mode of the attribute ascribed to God, but the fact that it is *God* who

possesses it. What's different when such terms are used of God is therefore not their *meaning* but their *importance*; their importance is infinite because it's the unconditional, self-existent God who stands in those relations to us. So while it is true that we cannot experience or conceive of the *originating* being of God - the being that is the source of all creatures and of his own accommodated nature - we can both experience and conceive of the *fulfilled* being of God, i.e., God as the one who really has the attributes he reveals and who has sworn to do so forever. That is why the language expressing that nature is univocal, ordinary language.

Yet another slant from which to think about this view of God's nature in relation to religious language is to say that on this view what makes religious language true is the same activity of God that made the incarnation true. That is, in the incarnation God made himself known by assuming to himself the whole (created) person of Jesus and thus taking on our (created) human nature. Just so, says this view, right from the beginning God took on the created properties and relations that comprised the personality he wished to reveal to humans. The Athanasian Creed puts this point beautifully when it says that the incarnation doesn't mean that "our humanity was transformed into deity, but that the divine took our humanity into itself." Thought of in this way, it should be clear that distinguishing between God's uncreated, unaccommodated, unknowable being and his knowable accommodations to humanity does not lead to the objection that all we know is a "mask" of God. It is not that the "real" nature of God is unknown so that what we do know is something other than God. No, what God reveals is what he has really become and promised to be forever. God has no other nature than the one he has revealed, the one now everlastingly embodied in Jesus Christ. So although the Cappadocian/ Reformational view of God emphasizes that God's attributes are relations in which he freely stands to creation, and thus denies that those attributes have uncreated necessary existence individually or that God is to be defined as the unity of those attributes, it can at the same time maintain that what God has revealed of that nature is univocally and everlastingly true of him.

3) Let's now consider the philosophical objection that holding God's unaccommodated being to be beyond our ability to conceptualize is a self-referentially incoherent position. Echeverria says it is, and quotes Plantinga in support (p. 103). The incoherence is supposed to follow from the following hypothetical syllogism: 1. if none of our concepts apply to God then we cannot know or believe anything about God, and 2. if we cannot know or believe anything about God then we can't know about God that none of our concepts apply to him.

With respect to the two premises of this argument, Dooyeweerd denies the first. It is not the case, he holds, that all our knowledge is conceptual. Here we should think again about the quote from Dooyeweerd offered earlier, the one I said we would return to. For at the beginning of that quote, Dooyeweerd alludes to a distinction he employs repeatedly, namely, the difference between a concept and a limiting idea. The distinction is important for this issue because he holds that while we do have concepts of the (created, relational) attributes God has taken on so as to form the nature by which he accommodates himself to us, we have only a limiting idea of God's uncreated being

(*N.C. I*, 73 note, 92-93; *Jerusalem and Athens*, 86-88). Moreover, he follows the Cappadocians and Calvin by holding that it is the conceptual knowledge of God that we learn first, prior to the limiting concept. We first know God by encountering his accommodated nature revealed in his word, incarnated in Christ, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is subsequent to such knowledge that we learn from revelation the further truth that there is more to God than we can conceptualize. So does this reply succeed? Does the distinction between a concept and a limiting idea enable this position to avoid self-referential incoherence? To see why it does, we need to examine more closely what Dooyeweerd means by “concept” and “limiting idea”.

For Dooyeweerd, the difference between a concept and an idea is that a concept is formed by distinguishing or isolating (some) properties of a thing and combining them into a thought-unit. We can, of course, also abstract properties from many things so as to form the concept of a class of things. But, as we saw, he insists that neither concepts of individuals nor concepts of classes of individuals are the only sort of knowledge we can have. There are also limiting ideas. A limiting idea is what we form when we think about something the intrinsic properties of which cannot be distinguished and combined into a concept. Take, for example, the limiting idea: a number no one has ever conceptualized. Surely there are such numbers; in fact, there are an infinity of them since the numbers are infinite. Is my claim to have this idea self-referentially incoherent? Did I just conceptualize such a number simply by framing that idea? No, I formed the idea *that there is such a number* without thereby distinguishing any properties or combining them into a precise concept of *what any such number is*. I do not know exactly what any of those numbers are, nor could I. For as soon as I conceptualized any number not previously thought of, it would no longer be a number no one had ever conceptualized. To put the difference more generally, it is not the case that the only way to know something is to conceptualize it by distinguishing and combining its non-relational properties. We can also form a limiting idea that there is an entity whose nonrelational properties we can't experience or distinguish, but which we can know and speak about *in virtue of the relations in which it stands to other things which we can conceptualize*. The example of a limiting idea Dooyeweerd most often mentions is that of the human self. The self (heart) is not an object presented to our experience, and we are not able to examine it and abstract properties from it so as to form a concept of its intrinsic nature. (In fact, the unknowability of the heart is a revealed truth; scripture specifically asserts more than once that humans cannot know their own hearts or those of others.) Nevertheless, we can know *of* the heart as the source of “all the issues of life”, as the seat of all the activities and characteristics of human nature that we do experience and conceptualize. In the same way, Dooyeweerd holds, the uncreated being of God can be known in virtue of the relations in which it stands to all else. Chief among those relations is that God's being is what all else depends on for existence. And the “all else” includes not only all of creation which is distinct from God, but also the (relational) attributes God himself has created, taken on, and revealed. It is these we can conceptualize. It is this distinction Dooyeweerd has in mind when he says:

...like all human experience in this earthly dispensation,
our knowledge of God, although directed to the absolute

Truth, is also restricted and relativized *by* (but not at all *to*) our temporal existence...In the order of this life...all human experience remains bound to [creation]...For this reason Christ, as the fullness of God's Revelation, *came in the flesh*; and for this reason also the Divine Word-revelation came to us in the temporal garb of human language. (*N.C.* II, 561)

This answer seems to me to obviate the alleged self-referential incoherence of Dooyeweerd's position. In order to reject it, one would have to argue either that there are no such things as limiting ideas, or that even if there are such ideas God's uncreated being isn't one of them.²⁶

4) Another question that may be asked about this view of God's nature - one not raised by Echeverria - is whether it has any biblical warrant. I think the answer is that it does, but this claim needs qualification. It is surely not true that there is a section of the Bible that deals with the question of how God possesses his attributes. Nor is it the case that scripture contains specific remarks addressed to this question that can be compiled and summarized to arrive at a definitive teaching. There are at best clues and hints not sufficient of themselves to constitute a required doctrine. But what biblical evidence there is seems to favor the Cappadocian/Reformational position without exception. One piece of that evidence is the point just mentioned about the incarnation. Since God took on the humanity of Jesus, it is surely the case - contra Anselm and Aquinas - that God can and does have properties and stand in relations that are not essential to his existence. A second piece of evidence comes from what we saw earlier about the metaphors of light and darkness standing for knowledge and falsehood. For when that point is brought to bear on Col. 1:15, it shows that when St Paul called Christ "the image of the invisible God" he was not merely speaking about whether God can enter our field of sight. Rather, "invisible" there means "unknowable". What he said, then, amounts to saying that Christ is the knowable manifestation of God who is (otherwise) unknowable. Perhaps this is what Calvin had in mind when he said:

As for those who proudly soar above the world to seek God in his unveiled essence, it is impossible but that at length they entangle themselves in a multitude of absurd figments. For God - [otherwise] invisible...clothes himself, so to speak, with the image of the world, in which he would present himself to our contemplation.²⁷

Yet another biblical support comes from the book of Proverbs. There wisdom, speaking in a personification, says of herself:

Yahweh possessed me from the beginning of his way,

²⁶ There are more examples of limiting ideas than the self, God, and numbers no one has conceptualized. E.g., Dooyeweerd also regards individuality as a limiting idea rather than a concept. (*NC* III, 61-67), and we could add that an end or beginning of time or space are also ideas rather than concepts.

²⁷ *Commentary on the First Book of Moses*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 60.

the first of his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth. While as yet he had not made the earth...nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he made the heavens I was there...and I was with the sons of men. (Prov. 8:22-31)²⁸

Here we are specifically told that one of God's attributes - his wisdom - was created by him, which is exactly what the Anselm/Aquinas position denies. Of course, neither this text nor any other I know of goes on to say the same is true for all God's other attributes, so extending this to the others depends on generalizing what is said here about God's wisdom. But what could be the reason for supposing it is only God's wisdom, among all his attributes, that is the result of his having created and possessed it?

5) "Fides et Ratio" ends with a call for a Christian metaphysics as over against Dooyeweerd's "anti-metaphysical view" which "entails skepticism" (p. 103). In support of the alleged skepticism, Echeverria cites *N.C.* II, 572 where Dooyeweerd is insisting that the interconnectedness of all the aspects of experience is unbreakable. He says there that no truth can be independent of its connectedness to the rest of reality, so that if we attempt to isolate even something as obvious as $2 + 2 = 4$ it "has no meaning outside of this temporal order". After quoting this, Echeverria says he takes it to mean that "God's knowledge and human knowledge do not coincide at this point, or any point..."

This is surely one of the most puzzling remarks of the entire article. The single most important argument Dooyeweerd offers in the *New Critique* is his defense of the following claim: although we can abstract specific properties and laws, and entire kinds of them (aspects), from the objects that exhibit them, we cannot so much as frame the idea of any aspect in isolation from the others. Try it, he says. Try to think of any aspect apart from all the others. Can you do it? If not, you have confirmed in your own self-reflection what is wrong with trying to justify the claim that any aspect has real independence from the others. (How can you justify what you can't even think of?) And that is the point he's making with the example of $2 + 2 = 4$ (Cmp the reference cited by Echeverria with *N.C.* I, 116). Dooyeweerd takes his example from the quantitative aspect, and his point is that if we attempt to think of mathematical properties, relations, laws etc., as truly independent of all the other aspects, those mathematical concepts become literally meaningless. To see the power of this argument, one must make the thought experiment of mentally stripping from $2 + 2 = 4$ all its connections to other aspectual kinds of properties and laws: spatial, physical, sensory, logical, linguistic, etc. What is then left? Doesn't the equation itself disappear?

This argument is anything but skeptical with respect to the truth of $2 + 2 = 4$. It is skeptical only with respect to any claim that any mathematical truth, or the entire mathematical aspect of experience, has independent (divine) existence. I happen to think that this argument is decisive and without any adequate comeback. But even if someone else were to have a less favorable assessment of it, I'm completely at a loss to understand

²⁸ My translation here follows the Hebrew text rather than the Septuagint.

how anyone could misinterpret it to mean that “God’s knowledge and human knowledge do not coincide at this point, or at any point...” (p. 104). Where on earth did *that* come from?

Finally, it is the crowning irony of “Fides et Ratio” that it ends by calling for a “Christian metaphysics” as over against Dooyeweerd’s “anti-metaphysical stance”. We have already seen that Echeverria uses “metaphysics” in four different senses, and that it is only metaphysical speculation about *God* that Dooyeweerd opposes (*N.C.* I, 92-93, 104). But the irony is compounded exponentially by the description Echeverria offers of the sort of metaphysical theory Christians should seek to develop. In the quote cited earlier we saw him endorse the pope’s call for a “ ‘...Christian philosophy’ [which is not] ‘an official philosophy of the Church, since the faith as such is not a philosophy’, rather it is ‘a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived [and practiced] in dynamic union with faith.’” (p.98). The irony is that it was Dooyeweerd, more than anyone else, who deserves to be credited with having constructed just that sort of metaphysics (so long as “metaphysics” means “theory of *created* reality”). Furthermore, he did so at a time when most Thomists rejected the possibility of a truly “Christian philosophy” - one that is “reformed from within” by being “in dynamic union with faith” - as a contradiction in terms!²⁹ Over against that tradition, Dooyeweerd constructed a just such a metaphysics. He developed a theory of reality that is internally controlled and guided by belief in God. The result was a brilliant, nonreductionist theory of created reality that is both subtle and elegant, and exceeds in explanatory power every other metaphysics ever written - Aristotle’s not excepted.

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²⁹ See F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*. (Westminster Maryland, The Newman Press, 1960), vol. II, p. 556 ff.