

# Herman Dooyeweerd on Faith and Apostasy

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## 1. Introduction.

The concept of faith as a function intrinsic to all of human life is one of the principal insights of Abraham Kuyper which Herman Dooyeweerd has taken up and worked with fruitfully. However, Dooyeweerd's exposition of the human faith function is not without its problems. One of the most pressing of these relates to his view of the nature of faith in an apostate condition.

In Dooyeweerd's view, apostate faith is in a closed condition, and unable to lead the cultural opening process. However, he also recognises that such cultural opening does in fact occur.<sup>1</sup> This situation indicates that there is an intrinsic problem in his theory, one which is a major hindrance to his theory of cultural development, as well as to his theory of the nature of faith.

In exploring this problem two further concepts of Dooyeweerd's philosophy stand out in connection with his theory of faith. These are the nature of self-knowledge, and the nature of creation as revelation. In an attempt to clarify Dooyeweerd's concept of apostate faith these two concepts will be discussed in connection with the explanation he gives of the nature and origin of apostasy.

## 2. Self-Knowledge.

Dooyeweerd continually ties the knowledge of the self to knowledge of God. In this respect he is following both Calvin and Kuyper, who also stressed the necessity of knowledge of God for true self-knowledge, and also Augustine and Anselm.<sup>2</sup> Calvin opens his **Institutes of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd. **A New Critique of Theoretical Thought**. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 4 Vols., 1953 - 1958, Vol. II, 297. Hereafter cited as NCTT with volume and page.

<sup>2</sup> Young, p. 53. It is interesting to note that Descartes also uses the knowledge of God as the guarantee of his own knowledge, that is, of the "cogito ergo sum". For him to be certain of this "self-

**Christian Religion** with a section on this very topic. "... it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinizing himself."<sup>3</sup> Dooyeweerd, in a similar vein, makes the following comment in connection with this section of Calvin's Institutes.

The religious meaning of the created world binds the true knowledge of the cosmos to true self-knowledge, and the latter to the true knowledge of God. It is the only purely Biblical view and the alpha and omega of any truly Christian epistemology.<sup>4</sup>

In Dooyeweerd's view the creation is meaning, which finds its fulfillment only in Christ, the fullness of meaning. Therefore true knowledge of created reality, including the self, can be known only as we acknowledge Christ and find in Him the source of all meaning for that which is created. Therefore in an apostate condition, there is no true knowledge of God, ourselves or the cosmos.<sup>5</sup>

Dooyeweerd argues that this dependence on God for true knowledge of ourselves and the cosmos can be known only by means of divine revelation. "... true knowledge of God and of ourselves surpasses all theoretical thought. This knowledge ... can only be acquired by the operation of God's Word and the Holy Spirit in the heart, that is to say, in the religious centre and root of our entire human existence and experience."<sup>6</sup> From such revelation we learn that in creating us in His image, God revealed in the human ego the focus of the totality of meaning of the temporal cosmos. Since this cosmos is centred on its Origin, and since the human being expresses the image of God, this focus therefore has a religious character. The dependence of human self-knowledge on the knowledge of God has its ground in this religious character of our creatureliness.<sup>7</sup> Repugnance of the heart, the ego or religious centre

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evident truth" he must rely on the goodness of God which will not allow him to be deceived. A M Wolters, **Our Place in the Philosophical Tradition**. Toronto: Institute for Christian studies, 1975, p 6. See also my paper "Descartes' theory of contingency." *Anakainosis* 6 (1982) 2, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin. **Institutes of the Christian Religion**, Book 1, I, 2.

<sup>4</sup> NCTT II, 560-561. Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd. **In the Twilight of Western Thought**. Nutley, N.J. Craig Press, 1972, pp. 120-121.

<sup>5</sup> NCTT II, 561.

<sup>6</sup> Dooyeweerd, **In the Twilight**, p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> NCTT I, 55. Vincent Brummer. **Transcendental Criticism and Christian Philosophy**. Franeker: T Wever, 1961, p. 85.

of the human being, towards this Word-revelation results in the impossibility of true self-knowledge, since the heart has rejected the knowledge of God. This is the core of apostasy, in that the heart is closed off to God, and therefore the temporal functions of human life, including the faith function, are likewise closed off to God.

Thus apostasy from God's Revelation is an attempt to elevate creaturely meaning to the level of God's being, absolutising that creaturely meaning as an idolatrous substitute revelation.<sup>8</sup> This absolutisation of relative or created meaning results in a distorted understanding of the coherence of creation, which is ordered by God, subject to Him and bound by Him to the religious root of mankind in an inseparable coherence. Apart from this religious root, the creation has no meaning and so no reality. Therefore the apostasy of the heart brings with it the apostasy of the entire creation. The consequence of this is the semblance of chaos in the creation, originating in the distortion of our understanding of its true character.<sup>9</sup>

Self-reflection on the modal functions, which are **our** modal functions, reveals the possibility of knowledge of the modal law-spheres. By this self-reflection we experience the coherence between the modal aspects of reality.<sup>10</sup> In apostasy, we lose our understanding of this experience as a result of a false conception of our own nature, that is, a distorted self-knowledge. And since self-knowledge is dependent on the knowledge of God, by focusing on an apostate god-substitute, that is, an aspect of reality absolutised in violation of its own dependence upon God, the self-hood cannot attain to a full self-knowledge. Because self-knowledge is dependent on knowledge of an origin, a substitute origin must be invented if there is to be any knowledge of the self at all.<sup>11</sup>

All knowledge rests on the foundation (of a religious character) provided by the horizon of human experience. This restricts and relativises that knowledge, including knowledge of God. The reason for this is that the self-hood cannot direct theoretical thought without a concentration on a true or pretended origin of meaning. This concentration on an origin is rooted in the heart and is therefore of a religious character, since it is dependent on our

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<sup>8</sup> NCTT I, 100.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> NCTT I, 474.

<sup>11</sup> NCTT II, 325. Brummer, **Transcendental Criticism**, p. 88.

response to Divine Revelation. From the heart this revelation penetrates our entire consciousness,<sup>12</sup> and enables us to grasp a proper perspective on our human experience in the light of the Truth.

Apostate superficial resting within the temporal horizon of human experience, supposing the origin to have been found within the creation, is contrary to the truth and the structure of our self-hood. There is no possible self-sufficient temporal meaning of an absolute character which depends on a created thing.<sup>13</sup>

A proper perspective on our human experience is possible only if the thinking self-hood stands in the Truth as a result of accepting Divine Revelation in the heart. This acceptance is full confidence in the reliability of God's Word, and in God as the source and origin of all truth. The relative truth of creation has no validity apart from this fullness of truth which is manifest in Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Through this fullness of truth we come to a true knowledge of human sinfulness and the Lie is unveiled, and we are led to surrender to Christ.<sup>15</sup> This surrender is the abandonment once and for all of the illusion of possessing the norm for truth in our own fallen self-hood. It brings the realisation that outside of the light of God's Revelation we stand in falsehood.<sup>16</sup>

The Lie is the conception that human experience can provide its own criterion for truth in autonomy. This Lie dispenses with the knowledge of God and rebels against the Truth. The rebellious human heart then attempts to create its own horizon for human experience by absolutising the relativity of aspects of the creation, so as to find a fixed point of support for a rebellious human self-hood.<sup>17</sup>

But this horizon of human experience is a religious horizon since it provides the structure for self-consciousness which partakes in the religious root of creation. This horizon is therefore

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<sup>12</sup> NCTT I, 55.  
<sup>13</sup> NCTT II, 572.  
<sup>14</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>15</sup> NCTT II, 561-563.  
<sup>16</sup> NCTT II, 564.  
<sup>17</sup> NCTT II, 563.

directed towards God or away from Him in apostasy. It gives the self-hood experience of the indissoluble coherence and modal and typical refraction of meaning within the creation.<sup>18</sup> The horizon is subject to law, limited and determined by the law in its religious sense. The creaturely character of the self-hood ensure the religious character of human experience,<sup>19</sup> since religion is absolute self-surrender. Supposing the self-hood to be something in and of itself brings surrender to idols, and absolutising what is relative reveals the dependent character of the religious human heart in which human existence is centred.<sup>20</sup> Surrender of the heart to a true or pretended origin of all things transcends all modal aspects of reality including that of faith.<sup>21</sup> It is a choice of position in relation to the origin of meaning. In apostasy this position is of an immanent character, and undoubtedly religious.<sup>22</sup>

However, in apostasy there is no possibility of experiencing temporal reality and events as they really are, that is, as meaning pointing above and beyond itself to the true centre and Origin of meaning.<sup>23</sup> Radical misunderstanding of the creation further limits the possibility of true insight into the creation order. False conceptions are compounded as the human heart moves further away from its true resting point in rebelling against Divine Revelation, since this revelation is directed to the heart of human existence.

This divine Revelation remains the foundational principle for all human faith functioning, even in apostasy. Therefore the nature of apostasy is not purely arbitrary but restricted and made possible by the very revelation against which it is rebelling,<sup>24</sup> and is rooted in creation, and thus is bound to the limits of the divine order of meaning. The religious impulse of the heart in seeking a concentration point enables it to fasten on an idolatrous concept of meaning as the source of certainty.<sup>25</sup> This absolutising of relative meaning in apostasy produces idolatrous ground motives which conceal within themselves a religious antithesis, with the result that the rest of reality, to which that relative meaning is bound in an inseparable coherence, continually recurs in the form of contradictions.<sup>26</sup> That is, it results in a religious

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<sup>18</sup> NCTT II, 560.

<sup>19</sup> NCTT I, 552.

<sup>20</sup> NCTT I, 58.

<sup>21</sup> NCTT I, 57.

<sup>22</sup> NCTT I, 20.

<sup>23</sup> NCTT III, 30.

<sup>24</sup> NCTT II, 308, 316.

<sup>25</sup> NCTT I, 63.

<sup>26</sup> NCTT I, 64.

dialectic between the deified aspect and the ones to which it is related. Therefore these religious ground-motives contain two poles which continually drive human thought and action in opposite directions.

### 3. Myth

The order of creation, that is, the norms for its existence and functioning, can be understood correctly only through acceptance of Divine Word-Revelation. This alone can show the true meaning and coherence of all reality in its dependence upon God.<sup>27</sup> Apostate faith is governed by a rejection of this revelation, because of a repugnance of the heart to the Word of God. In so doing apostate faith has rejected the normative character for the function of faith, namely subjection of our belief to that Revelation. This disobedient response leaves the person without a principle of coherence and meaning by which to gain insight into the world-order, and so a substitute principle must be invented. This substitute principle is a substitute revelation, and is founded in the mistaken interpretation of the world order governed by apostate faith. This mis-interpretation is called myth.<sup>28</sup>

Even when theoretical thought is opened up, it is still prone to mythical aberrations as long as it is, under the guidance of apostate faith, shut off to Divine Revelation.<sup>29</sup> So even in the opening of the higher modes there is no true insight possible into the world-order and its fullness of meaning in Christ, as long as the heart is turned away from God. Therefore a sophisticated Westerner and a simple tribesman are in the same position spiritually with regard to insight into the world-order while both are bound by apostate faith.

The definition of myth has been problematic for both Biblical studies and cultural anthropology. In practise, these two fields are linked, since the concepts used in Biblical studies regarding myth derive from those developed in cultural anthropology and transmitted through "comparative religion" as it is applied to the religion of the Ancient Middle East,

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<sup>27</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd. **Roots of Western Culture**. Toronto: Wedge, 1979, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> NCTT II, 315.

<sup>29</sup> NCTT II, 334; III, 29.

including the Old Testament. The concept of myth is surrounded by confusion and disagreement.<sup>30</sup> However Dooyeweerd's philosophy is able to provide some solutions.

Since, as explained above, the creation cannot be interpreted correctly except by means of the Divine Word-revelation, in apostasy it is necessary to find a substitute principle of interpretation. This substitute, if it is to have credibility and a point of contact with reality, must derive in some way from man's perception of that reality. But since man's perceptions and understanding has been contaminated by sin, he will be mistaken and misled in this interpretation. When such mis-interpretations, which are governed by faith perceptions of the world-order, are given lingual form, they can then be communicated to others and thereby shape their perceptions of the world also. When such faith-perceptions are accepted as the guide in a community of people, then we see the origin of myth.

Myth is in conflict with God's Word-revelation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, myth and Holy Scripture are mutually exclusive. There is no myth in Scripture, since this is in no way misleading or mistaken as it interprets God's world to us. There can be no true revelation in myth, since it is a mistaken interpretation which fosters disobedience to God and continuing rejection of His Word-revelation, and therefore no true myth.<sup>32</sup> Scripture and myth both give faith-interpretations of the world and its relationship to God (or gods). The similarities in content, theme and idea do not remove the radical antithesis between them but point up even more clearly the extent to which myth goes astray, since these themes and ideas are not in the service of God but strengthen apostasy from God. By means of God's common grace there may be true insight into the world incorporated in myth,<sup>33</sup> but this must not be mistaken for a true interpretation.<sup>34</sup> There are factors which preclude this.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. G E Wright, **God who Acts**. Biblical theology as recital Studies in Biblical Theology, 8. London: SCM, 1952, pp. 120-128, on the confusion behind the use of the term 'myth' in Biblical studies. He charges that the use of this term for Scripture results in a form of Docetism, since the historical thrust of the Scripture is not considered, and it makes no difference whether the events of Biblical narrative ever happened or not. This is to assume that the reality of the situation is not important, only that which appears to us to be of importance is "real".

<sup>31</sup> NCTT II, 312.

<sup>32</sup> C S Lewis' use of the phrase "true myth" and speaking of "myth become fact" hinders rather than assists the development of a useful perspective on myth. It assumes the method rejected above and also rejected by Wright, op. cit., that pagan myth can elucidate Scripture, rather than the reverse, the position taken in this paper. Lewis' view seems to be influenced by Neo-Kantianism in this regard.

<sup>33</sup> NCTT II, 326.

<sup>34</sup> L Kalsbeek. **Contours of a Christian Philosophy**. Toronto: Wedge, 1975, p. 133.

... moments of truth in the apostate faith are baffled because of the radically false direction of the basic motive of the pseudoreligion. The elements of truth left in apostate "theologia naturalis" can only be understood in the light of God's Word-revelation... In the light of Divine Word-revelation the recognition of this state of affairs will enable us to get an insight into the **true** meaning of the important elements of truth discovered by God's grace... No single partial truth is a self-sufficient moment that can be set apart. The partial elements of truth are falsified when interpreted from an immanence standpoint.<sup>35</sup>

This means then, among other things, that we must see the moments of truth in pagan mythology in the light of God's Word which alone can reveal their true meaning, while remaining conscious of how those moments malfunction within an internally consistent system which strives to interpret the world in apostasy. Therefore we can never use the meaning of pagan myths, such as those of Ugarit and Babylon, to try to interpret problematic passages in Scripture.<sup>36</sup> Error cannot elucidate truth, and it is only by means of the Scriptures that the elements of truth in pagan myth can be discerned.

Myth is the result of the apostate imagination giving shape to a view of the world which has been conceived in apostasy, and is essentially fictive.<sup>37</sup> By fictive, Dooyeweerd does not mean in this context the artful composition of story and poem, but the concoctions of a misled imagination guided by idolatrous faith.<sup>38</sup> He stresses that not every faith-view is mythical, only those which imply an essential moment of fiction. But again not every fictive expression of even apostate hearts is mythical, but only those which are an expression of **faith**. There is a distinction between myth, which is essentially related to faith, and legend, which is qualified by the historical or perhaps the aesthetic.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> NCTT II, 311.

<sup>36</sup> See the excellent discussion of this point by G C Berkouwer, **Sin**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, pp. 81-88, especially p. 83.

<sup>37</sup> NCTT II, 325.

<sup>38</sup> G E Wright also makes the same point that myth is a combination of faith and imagination. **God who Acts**, p. 125.

<sup>39</sup> NCTT II, 326.

There have been many attempts to interpret myth as an historical, aesthetic or logical expression of conceptions about the world. This is the source of the present confusion about myth; it has not been clear what kind of material the theories are dealing with. Because these theories have not seen the truly pistic character of myth, they are unable to provide a satisfactory account of the pistic aspect in myth, and this usually derives from an inadequate account of the nature of religion. For instance, Cassirer sees myth as the product of a primitive psychology, as do Jung, Freud and Levi-Strauss. This indicates that for them religion is reducible to the psychic aspect, as indeed is the case in their theories. Bultmann sees myth as an attempt to analyse the mysteries of nature, arising out of his view that religion is analytical, and the higher the analytical sophistication the truer the religion. Or myth can be seen as legitimising the customs, tribal groups and cultural heritage of a people. In this view myth, and religion, is a purely historical affair, as in the theories of J G Frazer and T H Gaster.

Myth, and religion, can be seen to arise in the development of speech, and the more developed the level of speech, the less need for myth, and religion. Such a lingual reductionism can be seen in the Grimm brothers, authors of the "Grimm's Fairy Tales". Or myth can be seen to legitimise a cultic ritual or belief, and to provide an explanation of the existence of such things. This is a reduction of religion to the pistic, and can be seen in S H Hooker (of the "Myth and ritual" school, which name in itself indicates something of the theory) Mircea Eliade, and R Niebuhr.

However, each of these theories fails to do justice to the nature and function of myth in the life of a community, based as they are on Westernised evolutionary or developmental views, which see religion as a redundant or optional aspect of human life. As mentioned before, myth functions in a community as a pseudo-revelation, providing a means for interpreting the world as a substitute for the true interpretation given by Word-revelation.

Myth is a story or narrative cycle which grounds and gives meaning to the totality of man's existence by relating it in a fundamental way with the totality of the universe... The myth is not directed towards an intellectual need, which might be satisfied with the discovery of a primary cause. It is hard to see in

myths the product of a purely intellectual curiosity which merely looks for a cause to explain why animals, plants, and so on exist.<sup>40</sup>

While I disagree with the contention that myth is necessarily a story or narrative cycle, the rest of the comment is helpful. Kirk has pointed out that myths vary considerably in their morphology and function.<sup>41</sup> By seeing myth as a type of literature or oral tradition with a purpose of substituting for divine Revelation, it is possible to break out of the confusions surrounding the attempts to classify myth according to its literary form or social function. Myth in fact can be a story, poem, song, or even a concept such as evolution; anything, in fact, which can be communicated to a people and guide and shape their perception of the world in a religious sense.

What makes a story a myth is not its content but the use to which the content is put. The success of the myth depends upon its telling and the belief of the hearer in the totality of its truth. Once accepted, the story and its interpretation are then used by their hearers to explain their circumstances and direct their future actions. This ability to guide action distinguishes myth from ordinary story. Myths are, in fact, stories with the power to change lives and shape the society in which they are told.<sup>42</sup>

It appears essential then to re-examine the various literary aspects of a particular culture to determine what really is myth and what has been classified as such on the basis of an inadequate concept of religion and the nature of human (and especially non-Westernised) psychology, usually placed in an evolutionary framework.

The use of these various aspects to qualify myth arise from the fact that myth, in so far as it has a literary form, and is based on communication, is founded in the lingual aspect, and qualified by the pistic, but of course has the other aspects present as anticipatory and

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<sup>40</sup> L Dequeker, "Noah and Israel." in **Questions disputes d'Ancien Testament**. Vol. 33: Methode en Theologie. 1974, pp. 121-2.

<sup>41</sup> G S Kirk. **Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p 7.

<sup>42</sup> Irving Hexham. **The Irony of Apartheid**. Texts and studies in Religion: Vol. 8. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1981, p. 31.

retrociatory moments. But these theories have all failed to break through the scientific mystifications of Western thought, and do not see the truly pistic character of myth, as opposed to a merely cultic context. For instance, a story or poem may always be recited in the context of a cultic ritual or celebration, but this does not alter its non-pistic qualification if it is not a true myth. Similarly a wedding is a juridical event of a public-legal character in spite of the fact that perhaps the majority of weddings take place in the context of a religious service.

This functioning of myth in all the modal aspects is a characteristic shared with Divine Word-revelation, which finds specific content as norms related to each aspect. For instance, Dooyeweerd argues that the power of the State manifests the reality of the Omnipotence of God: "...within the temporal order of our experience this Word-revelation manifests itself in the same modal diversity of aspects, which we find in our own temporal human existence."<sup>43</sup>

While there is a distinction between myth and non-pistic conceptions of reality, every view of reality is of course religious at root, since they all arise out of the heart of man. But the important point is that not all these views of reality, all equally religious, are qualified by the pistic aspect, and thus cannot be called myth. Dooyeweerd stresses that magic is not mythical but analytic, although there is of course a pistic moment in magic. Dooyeweerd refutes Frazer's suggestion that magic precedes the cult and is replaced by it, (thereby making it of a primitive pistic character) by pointing to situations where they function simultaneously.<sup>44</sup> Dooyeweerd rejects Frazer's rationalistic evolutionism which produces his theory.

Dooyeweerd argues that magic is oriented to primary logical principles,<sup>45</sup> and does not seek to express the ultimate meaning of reality, but is oriented towards that which is perceived as mysterious. There is a moment of faith in magical thought without which it would be impossible,<sup>46</sup> but this is directed towards controlling natural forces with improper means. Therefore it is not a religious act directed towards the adoration of a deity.<sup>47</sup> This would seem to be correct. The practise of magic, even corporately, does not necessarily result in a cult, but gives initiated practitioners power over natural forces for their own nefarious ends. For that

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<sup>43</sup> Dooyeweerd. **In the Twilight**, p. 136.

<sup>44</sup> NCTT II, 314.

<sup>45</sup> NCTT II, 329.

<sup>46</sup> Dooyeweerd, **Roots of Western Culture**, p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

purpose then, magic may be connected with devil-worship, and indeed there is considerable magical activity connected with most idolatrous cults, but there would seem to be no intrinsic connection. There may well be idolatrous cults which do not encourage or encompass magical activities.

Given then that magic and idolatry may be but are not necessarily linked, this indicates that magic is indeed not a cultic phenomenon. Therefore witch trials of the past which interpreted magic as Satan-worship erred, although there may well have been instances of such association of activities. Magic is directed towards a manipulation of the environment for personal gain, which may be perceived to be enhanced by association with Satan-worship, but this is manipulative and not true service of a deity.

The problem of the decline of magic during the Enlightenment would be the result of the increasing banishment of the mysterious character of nature through articulation of the concept of all-encompassing natural laws, and not to the refutation of religious views of the world. This situation may also account for the rise of magic in the Middle Ages. The decline of Biblical Christianity and the perception of the world as God's creation correctly interpreted by His Word-revelation was accompanied by mystifications which laid themselves open to manipulative efforts at control of natural forces.

The problem of the definition of myth has therefore a fruitful solution in Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Since myth is a substitute for Divine Word-revelation and is in opposition to it, functioning as a guide in the life of a faith community, (that is, myth can never be a purely individual matter), it is apparent that myth is not a naïve or primitive phenomenon which modern society has exorcised. Dooyeweerd frequently identifies theoretical concepts with mythologising.<sup>48</sup> Concepts with a theoretical abstract character may in such cases simply mask the viewpoint of faith. Examples given by Dooyeweerd include the idea of a transcendental-logical subject in Kant's epistemology,<sup>49</sup> and the idea of a totalitarian State which levels all individuality structures to mere component parts of the State, under the illusion that they can retain their own essential character.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> NCTT II, 327.

<sup>49</sup> NCTT II, 326.

<sup>50</sup> NCTT III, 417.

Myth, for Dooyeweerd, is a pistical interpretation of the Divine revelation in the creation according to standards established by the fictitious conceptions of an autonomous pistical fancy.<sup>51</sup> It has a hybrid character which distinguishes it from non-mythical interpretations of reality. That is, it is related to a truth which is necessarily misunderstood, since it is characterised by apostasy but is dependent for its very existence (in a parasitical fashion) on Divine Revelation.<sup>52</sup> It is not simply mistaken, but inherently misdirected. As such it guides human thought into mistaken conceptions of the world, and thereby strengthens and distorts its own apostate character.

It is necessary for apostate faith to invent a framework and context within which these mistaken conceptions can have meaning-fulness consistent with their distorted character. But by so doing they are further distorted, and so the cycle of increasing apostasy and rebellion is driven on, wherever the search for a coherent world-view is carried out in a turning away from God. By further turning away from God, self-knowledge too is increasingly inhibited, contributing to a further breaking down of the true conception of the world as God's creation.

#### **4. The Opening Process**

However, it is interesting to note that in the context of apostasy Dooyeweerd stresses that culture has a task to fulfill in spite of itself.<sup>53</sup> All of human life, including that which is in rebellion against God, is still given structure and possibility by the transcendental conditions of the Word of God. This includes the task given to mankind at creation, to care for and develop the potential of creation. Since, then, all human life has as its transcendental condition for culture the Divine mandate to open up and care for the creation, this mandate is unavoidable. In the deepest apostasy this opening up is hindered and frustrated by spiritual bondage to absolutised physical and biotic forces. That drive is none the less present, as can be seen when a spiritually bound culture<sup>54</sup> comes into contact with a more opened up culture. This bound culture is forced to respond to the revelation of God's mandate manifest in cultural

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<sup>51</sup> NCTT II, 326.

<sup>52</sup> NCTT II, 326.

<sup>53</sup> NCTT I, 119.

<sup>54</sup> That is, a culture which is locked into maintaining a tradition in such a way that innovation and cultural expansion become impossible.

opening. While there may be resistance for a time, eventually such cultures begin to incorporate culturally deepened elements into their own cultural framework.

The challenge presented by confrontation with an opened up culture is unavoidable. At the minimum, such a closed culture must try to account for the things previously unknown in its experience of the world. That is, it must explain in terms of the absolutised relative aspect governing that culture the possibility of artifacts and lifestyle based on higher aspects, and thus not within the range of possibilities it had previously accepted. In so doing this culture must relativise its previously absolutised aspect, even though a higher aspect may then be absolutised.

Confrontation with a culture which is dominated by an absolutised personality-ideal, as opposed to absolutised impersonal forces of nature, makes it possible to further open up culture. This is a result of developing awareness of human power over nature, enabling it to be used for human ends, rather than being bound by its implacability.<sup>55</sup> While this possibility of cultural development allows a break with the rigidity of tradition, and an awareness that the forces of nature are not impersonal brute powers dominating mankind, it still results in the absolutisation of the relativity of creation, even while it brings disclosure of the higher aspects. Myth then deals with the personal history of gods, or god-like beings, and not simply with impersonal powers or spirits which lack a genuine personality.

In the religion of the Olympian gods this belief assumed a form that appealed to the imagination of the people; the Olympian gods were invisible, immortal, brilliant gods of form. They were personifications of the various cultural powers who lived far beyond the fate of mortals.<sup>56</sup>

While such a religious conception makes it possible to open up culture, by personifying and deifying immanent creational aspects and raising them to a transcendent position, the boundary between God and the cosmos is lost sight of. As a result other forms of cultural opening are hindered. Not until a concept of the radical separation between God and created reality is developed can further cultural unfolding take place. The Christian contribution to the

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<sup>55</sup> Dooyeweerd, **Roots of Western Culture**, p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

development of science is a possible example. In a situation where the forces at work in the world and culture are seen as manifestations of the various divine beings, the absolutised personifications of abstract forces, science is not possible.

In such apostate religion, not only are the cultural activities of mankind personified as deities, but also the nature deities of earlier development are given personality and incorporated into the pantheon. Thus there is an inherent tension within polytheism of this kind, between personified forces of nature and personified cultural powers. This can be seen in the conflict between culture religion and nature religion in Greece.

In an apostate undisclosed culture we recognise the subjective falling away of mankind from his Creator and therefore from his own selfhood.<sup>57</sup> This apostasy is, however, unable to set aside the temporal world-order, since all aspects, including that of faith, are bound together in an inseparable coherence. The fact that we experience a disharmony in the cultural opening process is a result of sin. The Divine law-order binds development to norms. When these are responded to disobediently they exact their own revenge on development. This revenge manifests itself as a disharmony between conflicting apostate realisations of a coherent normative order. This is the result of the absolutising of one aspect in an idolatrous manner, thus breaking the coherence of normative development of all the law-spheres, subject as a unity to the Word of God. Without sin the development of the law-spheres would be harmonious and integrated. An example of such revenge is given above in the conflict between culture and nature religions in Greece.

But since the coherence of creation cannot be abrogated even in apostate development, the disclosure of the various spheres must be in response to the norms given in the law-order for the creation. Such disclosure can in no way be arbitrary.<sup>58</sup> The divine principles in the norms for each law-sphere have been left to human positivising. These principles are realised and deepened in meaning by this human positivising, and cannot be changed by mankind even in apostate cultural development. This law-order means that there is a limit to the depths apostate mankind can sink to.

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<sup>57</sup> NCTT II, 296.

<sup>58</sup> NCTT II, 335.

Apostate faith, which is closed off to Divine Word-revelation, is unable to lead development in a transcendental direction. In this restrictive sense faith can never be the starting point of disclosure since all the anticipatory moments in earlier spheres are closed off.<sup>59</sup> The result of this is the formalistic character of the expression of the norms for each aspect, which imparts a rigidity in the way each aspect functions as a result of the apostate disclosure of absolutised relative meaning-moments.<sup>60</sup> This results in an antithesis between the development of the absolutised aspect and the others with which it has a close relation, usually the foundational aspect of the thing(s) qualified by the absolutised aspect.<sup>61</sup> This results in the religious antithesis in the experience of reality.<sup>62</sup> In such struggles arising from a religious antithesis apostate faith becomes rigid and dogmatic in attempting to assert supremacy over the opposing pole.

Even in advanced societies under the control of apostate faith this rigid character will be evident in the opening process, if such faith is tied to an absolutised pre-logical aspect. An instance of this is the humanistic mathematical science-ideal. Descartes sought the basis of both nature and fine arts in sovereign mathematical thought, resulting in the Enlightenment search for laws of poetry, drama, and so on. However, only mathematical, logical and similar analogies were discovered in the modal aesthetic meaning structure. But this mistake was sufficient to result in conceiving them to be laws for the aesthetic. Therefore the possibility of discovering the norms for the aesthetic aspect, with its own sphere universality and sovereignty, was prevented.<sup>63</sup> Similarly the humanistic science-ideal imparted rigidity to the secular philosophical ideal of historical development.<sup>64</sup>

There is, however, according to Dooyeweerd, a fundamental difference between a faith in nature, and faith restricted to a pre-logical aspect through a rationalistic absolutising of that aspect. The first will result in a closed down culture, the second a culture deepened in meaning in an apostate direction.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> NCTT II, 309-310.

<sup>60</sup> NCTT II, 188.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. NCTT I, 63.

<sup>62</sup> See above.

<sup>63</sup> NCTT II, 345-7.

<sup>64</sup> NCTT II, 349.

<sup>65</sup> NCTT II, 328.

Dooyeweerd argues that the mode of faith has a different meaning with respect to closure and rigidity because of its transcendent character.<sup>66</sup> The meaning nucleus of faith cannot be divorced from its direction towards or away from God and the revelation of the Arche. This restricted or closed sense for Dooyeweerd means that faith is closed off to Divine Revelation through the Word. Faith must still be related to that Revelation, even though it is in antagonism to it, dependent on the Revelation in creation, which provides the norm for its functioning.<sup>67</sup> The disclosure of apostate faith is restricted in the sense that it is unable to bring understanding of the true meaning of reality. Faith is still operative even in apostasy, since the Divine law-order of creation maintains all the functions of reality, and it does not disappear.<sup>68</sup> It remains a function of faith, and therefore Dooyeweerd argues that it must have a special restrictive structural law which has a transcendental character even in its restricted condition.<sup>69</sup>

Apostate faith is then a restricted faith, not in the sense that it is not deepened or disclosed, which certainly is the case in a culture with sophisticated religious beliefs, but because it is closed to its normative revelational principle, that is, submission of belief to Divine Word-revelation, and instead leads faith into submission into its own pistical fantasies. These take the form of myth, as discussed earlier. But since faith must find a principle of revelation, in myth it has absolutised normative laws for the creation which it discovered in the aspects which have been idolatrously absolutised. These normative laws are, however, confused in man's understanding because of the influence of sin. Only Word-revelation made known to the heart by the Holy Spirit can break through this confusion and reveal the truth.

Since a closed faith is an operating faith, intrinsically related to the normative law-side of revelation in creation, without which we could not continue to live and understand the world we live in, it is therefore closed **off** from God, but not closed **down**, that is, inoperative. Faith even in apostasy retains its guiding function even though it will lead to bondage to alien spiritual forces, and will restrict the development of culture by obscuring the norms for its obedient development subject to the Word of God. Such norms for development as are discovered by apostate faith are those revealed in the Divine law-order. This again points out

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<sup>66</sup> NCTT II, 306.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> NCTT II, 299.

<sup>69</sup> NCTT II, 309.

the fact that even in apostasy mankind is unable to escape from the transcendental conditions for his own existence and functioning given by God.

The primary norm for human life is the command to care for and develop the earth. Given the restrictive nature of a culture bound to tradition, it is inevitable and indeed desirable that tradition gives way to the development of culture in non-traditional directions.<sup>70</sup> While tradition is a positive thing, where it hinders the cultural opening process it becomes spiritual bondage. This spiritual bondage to the power of tradition is typical of apostate religion.

The life of the individual was embedded in society and society was embedded in the rhythm and balance of nature which was the realm of the gods. The whole aim of existence was thus to fit into the rhythm and integration of the cosmic society of nature... The good life was one which fitted into the established hierarchy of authority, beginning with the elder brother and the father in the family. Polytheism was thus pre-eminently a religion of the status quo, and it is a significant fact that no country where such a religion has provided the cultural background has ever been a dynamic force for social change.<sup>71</sup>

The reason for this lack of cultural dynamism is that through bondage to absolutised aspects of reality lower than the logical, there is no opening up of a norm for development, which is found only in the historical. At most there will be an anticipation in the lower aspects of the historical. But such growth and development as will be revealed in the context of a nature religion where there is an anticipation of the historical will be in the biotic, and thus unable to transcend the restricted meaning of development provided in that aspect.

It has often been pointed out that the pagan religions have no sense of history. Polytheistic man, borne on the rhythmic cycle of nature, has no primary concern with history; instead his focus of attention is on the yearly cycle in which life is recreated each spring and the blessing of order re-established. (The God of the Bible however) revealed himself by means of historical acts in

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<sup>70</sup> See Kalsbeek, **Contours of a Christian Philosophy**, p. 128.

<sup>71</sup> G E Wright, **God who acts**, p. 20.

which there were also historical promises. The focus of Biblical man's attention, therefore, was not on the cycle of nature but on what God had done, was doing and was yet to do according to his declared intention.<sup>72</sup>

Apostate religion is therefore unable to provide a concept of cultural development which is dependent on a norm higher than the one idolatrously absolutised. Lack of openness to transcendent revelation results in rigidity and traditionalism, in which the coherence of creational norms in every aspect will be obscured. However, Dooyeweerd points out that there is an opening process in apostasy.

It is simply impossible to deny that in various religions after a period of a primitive and diffuse belief in nature there is an opening process of *pistis* in an apostatical direction. This opening process is immediately connected with the emergence of the respective peoples from a more or less primitive stage of civilization.<sup>73</sup>

But while it is indeed impossible to deny such an opening, it remains to be explained how this is possible without the direct work of the Holy Spirit in turning faith, and therefore cultural development under its guidance, in a faithful direction. Dooyeweerd's own explanation is in many ways unsatisfactory. He argues that as a result of the development of transcendental self-consciousness, which comes about through realisation of the ability to transcend the foundational direction of time, there is freedom to anticipate revelation of God in the selfhood. Since knowledge of God is tied to knowledge of the self, an increase in self-knowledge makes awareness of a transcendent deity possible. This then allows mankind to devise an idol in terms of the deified aspects of the human personality. The typical condition for disclosure in apostasy is a search for the selfhood in the image of cultural idols, which give expression to man's elevation above the blind forces of nature.<sup>74</sup> Having opened up the post-logical norms for reality, the possibility of historical development is discovered. This enables a conception of development to be discovered which is not tied to a biotic anticipation, such as is found in organic worldviews.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>73</sup> NCTT II, 320.

<sup>74</sup> NCTT II, 322.

Dooyeweerd does not explain the possibility of this development of transcendental self-consciousness. He in fact holds that while the heart is alienated from God and closed to His Word-revelation, the only possible renewal is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Since the Fall the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word incarnate in Christ, redirects the creation to its Creator, the True Origin from whom it has fallen away.<sup>75</sup> The Holy Spirit opens the heart to receive the Word-revelation, since there is no possibility of a starting point for renewal within the fallen creation, that is, in the faith function as such.<sup>76</sup>

By hearing the Word, the true meaning of the creation-revelation is made known to the heart, and the faith function is then able to direct logical thought to Divine Word-revelation, so that that revelation can be understood.<sup>77</sup> In the light of Divine revelation the horizon of human experience is opened again and extricated from the confusion of apostasy.<sup>78</sup> The heart can then perceive its sinful dependence on idols and return to its true condition of dependence on God, and realises the like dependence of all created things.

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<sup>75</sup> NCTT I, 61.

<sup>76</sup> NCTT II, 310.

<sup>77</sup> NCTT II, 307.

<sup>78</sup> NCTT II, 549.

## 5. Conclusion

Dooyeweerd's theory of faith and the nature of apostasy has a number of difficulties still unsolved. For Dooyeweerd cultural opening from a condition of apostasy is possible only as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith even in its deepest apostasy is still bound to its structural principle, that is, submission to the Word-revelation which alone can interpret the meaning of the revelational principles or norms in the structure of creation. In apostasy faith turns to these revelational principles and absolutises one at the expense of all others. Only through the insight given in Word-revelation can the coherence of creational revelation be seen and correctly interpreted.

However, Dooyeweerd seems to be arguing that since these creational principles are also revelation from God made known in the order of creation, they also can be apprehended only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise revelation would be in such a situation, independent of God and discoverable by man unaided. Since then the Holy Spirit is at work even in apostate cultures making revelation known, Dooyeweerd does not lack an explanation for cultural opening but he does not seem to have realised this either. For Dooyeweerd cultural opening cannot take place apart from Revelation. Even after the Fall, this Divine Word-revelation which was given to Adam and Eve in Eden, continued to be communicated to the whole of mankind in its apostasy. It was only with the commencement of the line of redemption through Abraham and his seed that Word-revelation was restricted. It was given only to the people of Israel until the Church burst out of this restriction at Pentecost. Yet even this does not account for the revelation given to individual Gentiles prior to Pentecost, such as the Wise men of Matthew 2. However, leaving this problem aside for the present, Dooyeweerd seem to argue that the general Word-revelation prior to Abraham continued in a degenerate form in the various religions.<sup>79</sup> The level of cultural opening would be correlated with the level of degeneracy in the continuation of this tradition, that is, how corrupt the revelation became in the course of its transmission outside of a people who were faithful to that revelation.

Dooyeweerd in fact argues that cultural opening arises in apostasy from a transcending of

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<sup>79</sup> Dooyeweerd, **Roots of Western Culture**, p. 99.

primitive belief in nature, and an orientation to the revelation of God in the higher aspects, as a result of man becoming self-conscious in his apostasy.<sup>80</sup> This is because apostate faith, in the absence of awareness of supra-temporal transcendence, (being closed off to eternity) bases itself on its apostate religious root - its human self-consciousness. That is, man becomes conscious of himself and his supremacy over forces of nature as a result of developing his cultural artifacts. As a result there is a crisis of adequacy in the extent in which the revelational principle, absolutised in that culture, can explain the possibility of the development which has been realised. That is, by producing something new the bondage of traditionalism is broken, thus allowing for further development.

Dooyeweerd then does have a means by which he can explain the possibility of cultural opening in apostasy, although it is none too clearly spelled out in his writings, and may in fact be an explanation which he never fully realized himself. It does, however, indicate that his theory of cultural opening is not without ongoing value.

Dooyeweerd's theory of myth, as explained earlier, is a most helpful solution to a pressing problem in Biblical studies and cultural anthropology. It has brought many fruitful insights and is worth pursuing further. However, to have its full validity demonstrated, it will be necessary to examine closely those myths and other literary artifacts which have been used in developing other theories with a view to perhaps re-classifying them. This is especially important in structuralist views of myth which perhaps more than any other, betray inadequacies when subjected to this kind of critique.

An important point to stress in connection with the significance of myth and Scripture, is that while myth is a human artifact, and is founded in the lingual and qualified by the pistic, Scripture on the other hand cannot be qualified by any aspect, even the pistic. To do this would be to deny its transcendent character as Divine Revelation to the heart of man, which itself is not able to be qualified by a modal function. Scripture in fact has an individuality structure of a similar type, in Dooyeweerd's theory, to man himself. Scripture transcends the modal order and addresses all of it as a totality of creation. If this were not so, Scripture could not exercise its authority in the pistic, wherein all pistic functions are subject to the norm of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

that aspect, submission of belief to Word-revelation. This means then that pistically qualified documents such as Confessions of Faith, Catechisms and so on, are themselves subject to Scripture as creational expressions of human faith and are not of a transcendent character.

In all, there is much in Dooyeweerd's view of faith to appreciate, and it remains a most valuable contribution to Christian thought that should not be taken lightly where it is sought to carry on the task of Christian scholarship in obedience to God.