SPECTACLES

Biblical Perspectives on Christian Scholarship.

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This book contains the papers delivered by dr. G. Spykman during his stay in Potchefstroom as a guest lecturer at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education in August-September 1983. It was first published in 1985. I am delighted with this long-awaited reprint, because I regard it to be a small jewel. In a few chapters Spykman discusses the essentials of a reformational worldview and a Christian approach to scholarship. It is furthermore written lucidly in a semi-popular scholarly style, making it accessible to a wide readership.

May Spectacles help many Christians to polish their lenses to see their God-given calling with greater clarity. May our Lord richly bless this small book, with its great message!

— Prof. Bennie J. van der Walt, Director Institute for Reformational Studies, PU for CHE, Potchefstroom 2520.

* * *

Dr. Gordon J. Spykman retired in 1991 as professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A. His latest publication — his opus magnum —published by Wm. B. Eerdmans of Grand Rapids, is entitled Reformational Theology; towards a new paradigm for doing dogmatics. In this pioneering work he indicates the value of doing systematic theology from the perspectives of a Biblical-reformational philosophy.
PREFACE

During August and September, 1983 I spent five memorable weeks at the Potchefstroom University and Theological School, followed by a week at Bloemfontein University. For the generous hospitality and the very stimulating academic engagements I experienced I wish now to express my hearty thanks. My hosts managed to hold me to a very demanding, but delightful schedule of lectures and discus-ions. All told, it was sheer joy, with not a dull day along the way.

This little book is intended to capture some of the major themes from these many hours of rigorous and fruitful interchange with colleagues and students. These ideas were originally prepared for oral presentation. I am now recasting them into a more publishable form, aiming quite deliberately at a semi-popular scholarly style. For the sake of greater readability I shall therefore not encumber the reader with technical documentation, bibliography, or footnotes.

In bidding farewell to Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein I leave these pages behind in the hope that they may contribute to our mutual task of ongoing reformation in Christian scholarship.
THE TITLE: A word of explanation
The dictionary offers basically two definitions of the word „spectacles”. Firstly, it refers to a public display of unusual interest or notoriety, often a regrettable exhibition of bad conduct, but always something worthy of special attention. Secondly, it refers to glasses, a pair of lenses, or something resembling eyeglasses in shape or suggesting them in function, designed to improve eyesight or to correct vision. While, of course, this modest little book (not unlike other publications) is indeed meant to draw the attention of a certain readership, it is not that first definition (“What a spectacle!”) which is envisioned by its title. It is intended rather as a play on the second definition.

The idea of “spectacles” is obviously not a personal coinage. It comes down to us from John Calvin. In thus borrowing his analogy (whatever its antecedents) I am joining the ranks of countless others in seeking to exploit the rich potentials built into this familiar word-picture.

In Calvin’s theology this “spectacles”-image leaps from the page especially in the following well-known passage:
*Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly,. so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God (Institutes, 1, 6, 1).*

These striking lines are “probably Calvin’s decisive utterance on the role of Scripture as related to the revelation of the Creator in creation” (Institutes, J.T. McNeill, editor, footnote 1, p. 70). They also account for the title of this little book: SPECTACLES. This word-picture also lies behind the key term — “perSPECTives” — in the sub-title: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP. With this explanation let us now move along.
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I. FIVE HISTORIC VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

In his well-known book, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr develops five alternative views of culture. All five arise out of the western Christian tradition of the past two thousand years. Niebuhr analyzes them, with extensive documentation, under the general rubric of “culture”. Assuming that Christian scholarship is one important aspect of culture, the implications of what he says are then quite obvious for Christian higher education. Let us therefore seek to extrapolate briefly from each of these five stances toward culture some consequences for engaging in Christian scholarship.

DUAL NORMATIVITY

In his opening chapter, entitled “The Perennial Problem”, Niebuhr defines the issue in bipolar fashion. Christians are confronted with “two poles of authority” — Christ and culture. Both lay their claim upon us, though not with equal weight. For, among Christians, Christ is pre-eminent. Nevertheless Niebuhr does tacitly and uncritically accept this dual statement of the problem. As an historical judgment this assumption is probably correct. Most Christians, past and present, do seem to have lived their lives in terms of some such dual normativity. This then lends a large measure of descriptive credibility to the heart of his book.

In terms of the “single-mindedness” to which the Scriptures call us, however, this statement of the issue calls for a fundamental critique. Christians are called away from seeking to serve “two masters”. Theoretically too, Niebuhr’s starting-point is burdened with great difficulties. For a dualist statement of the problem can never yield a unifying answer. This is clear from Niebuhr’s closing chapter, called “An Unscientific Postscript”. There he ends on an ambivalent totoe, a dialectical balancing off of various tension-laden positions.

Between these very problematic opening and closing chapters, however, lies the substance of Niebuhr’s work. In these middle chapters he opens up the impact of five major alternative views of culture as held by various Christian persons and communities in the western world over the past two millennia. He does so from a Biblical, a confessional, a philosophical, and theological point of view. His
analysis of these various perspectives on the relationship between Christ and culture is instructive for a Christian understanding of the relationship between Scripture and scholarship.

Let us now review these five models.

**OPPOSITION**

*First:* Biblical religion stands opposed to scholarship. On this view, these two commitments stand in irreconcilable opposition. Christians therefore face an either/or choice. Tertullian gave classic expression to this outlook in his well-known rhetorical question, “What hath Jerusalem to do with Athens?” To which the clearly implied answer is, “Nothing!” Christian faith must distance itself from worldly learning. For one cannot be a friend of both God and the culture of the times. Christ-believers must therefore adopt a policy of “separation” and “isolation” from the sciences. Ultimately such a stance would lead to the monastery and the hermitage. The ancient trivium and quadrivium came to rest under a dark cloud of suspicion. Divine judgment was pronounced upon the Greek academies. A pessimistic attitude toward scholarly endeavours prevailed. At bottom this view involves a radical confusion of structure and direction — certain creational tasks and structures, in this case theoretical learning and educational institutions, are declared to be inherently anti-Christian.

In modern times this distortedly antithetical approach to scholarship has taken on shape and form in numerous so-called Bible Colleges. Taking a dim view of the study of general revelation, these schools concentrate on Bible study. After all, it is argued, too many students lose their faith by being exposed to philosophy, psychology, geology, anthropology, and other such “secular” disciplines. The Bible is therefore made the core of the curriculum. Such Bible Colleges may offer speech courses, so its graduates may effectively witness to and proclaim the gospel; and logic, so they can carry on a cogent defence of the Bible against its critics; and music, so they can present the good news melodiously. Large areas of creational revelation, however, are excluded from the curriculum. Christian scholarship is limited to Biblical studies.
ACCOMODATION

Second: Biblical religion and scholarly excellence are, potentially at least, in agreement with each other. Advocates of this view go on the assumption that the best of current scholarship as carried on by reputable scientific communities can be merged quite naturally with Christian beliefs. Accommodation and synthesis are the key ideas. In reality Biblical truth is compromised to make it palatable to the prevailing paradigms in the scholarly world. The result is, for example, a Christianized behaviourism or a theistic evolutionism. This view is often accompanied by an almost unbounded confidence in scientific methods. Science is enthroned as the messiah of modern society. Its methods, if rigorously applied, can bring healing to a troubled world. Traditionally this view literally exudes confidence in the scientific enterprise — though in recent times this optimism has been sorely tested. Basically, however, these liberal thinkers cling to the belief that Christianity and contemporary scholarship can be harmonized, the one evolving quite naturally into the other, free of tension and antithesis.

Many institutions of higher education have fallen prey to this spirit of synthesis. Universities such as Harvard and Yale, originally founded on Christian, even Calvinist principles, have across the centuries so accommodated Biblical beliefs to alien theories as to eclipse their original charters and succumb to secular humanism. In this blending process their Christian identity has been lost.

DUALISM

Third: Biblical religion and scholarship are pressed into a dualist structure. This nature/grace scheme in its classic form comes down to us from the medieval era. It was canonized in the works of Thomas Aquinas and perpetuated in most Roman Catholic schools. In terms of this view, science is good insofar as it goes, but religion is better. Faith knowledge belongs to a higher supernatural order, rational inquiry to a lower natural order. Accordingly scientific insight is accessible to unaided human reason apart from the light of divine revelation. Its basis is the natural laws of logic which are common to all men of good will. Theology, occupant of the superior order of reality, was crowned “queen of the sciences”, with philosophy and the other sciences serving as her “handmaidens”. The dogmas of the church, formulated by her theologians, functioned as the enforced criterion of truth for
all the other branches of scholarship. If there is any doubt on this matter, ask Galileo! The ultimate consequence of this view is the secularization of all non-theological scholarship. It is unable to offer significant resistance to the Kantian antinomy between science and morality or its more popularized version, the dichotomy between facts and values.

This typically Thomist construct is not limited to Roman Catholic education. Through the influence of seventeenth and eighteenth century Protestant scholasticism it became a dominant paradigm in many Protestant centres of learning as well. Even the classic Reformed distinctions between general and special revelation and between common and special grace were often allowed to degenerate into a medieval-like nature/grace dichotomy. All such upstairs/downstairs models of reality, however, deprive Christian scholarship of its Biblical integrity.

**PARADOX**

**Fourth:** Biblical religion and general scholarship represent two realms in life which stand in a paradoxical relationship to each other. The one belongs to the kingdom of God, the other to the kingdom of the world. Scientific activity, belonging to the worldly realm, lies under divine judgment. Yet this is not so radically true that Christians must flee it, as in the first position. Nor is it naturally good, as in the second view. But Christians are also not called to convert it unto Biblical obedience, as in the coming fifth perspective. Rather, we must accept it as a given state of affairs and learn to live with it in dialectical tension. Within the Christian community God rules by the gospel of his justifying grace in Jesus Christ. Within the public domain of life, including the academy, God rules by the law of reason and justice. The Bible deals with one set of questions, and scholarship with another. Scripture therefore serves as a limiting concept, such that the scientific enterprise is acceptable insofar as it does not contradict Biblical revelation.

This two-realm theory is most closely associated with the Lutheran tradition. It comes to its most radically paradoxical expression in a thinker such as Kierkegaard. Yet it is not limited to Lutheranism. It claims its devotees in many other evangelical circles as well. Its strong appeal lies perhaps in this, that it avoids the various extremes of the preceding positions by seeking a middle ground where the many complex factors involved in Christian scholarship
can be held together in a kind of tension-laden balance so that every question elicits a dialectical *yes* and *no* answer simultaneously. This also means, however, that no academic conference, even among Christian scholars, ever yields clear solutions to the problems at hand. Methodologically, Niebuhr’s analysis, despite its claim to “objectivity”, betrays the tell-tale marks of this approach.

**REFORMATION**

*Fifth:* Biblical religion aims at the conversion or transformation of scholarship as the cultural task and calling of all Christian academicians. This view, which Niebuhr associates with Augustine and Calvin, seeks to take seriously not only the pervasive effects of sin upon all life, including scholarship, but seeks also with counteracting seriousness to implement the comprehensive redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ. Such scholarship seeks to honour the all-embracing claim of God’s Word upon the entire scientific enterprise. Biblical authority bears upon the full range of Christian scholarly activities.

For Christian scholarship this is clearly the most promising of these five perspectives. If worked out consistently, it would lead to an abandonment of the dual normativity which informs the first four views. For the holist character of this fifth position implies a single transcendent norm to which scholarship is one form of response. Niebuhr’s work, however, falls short of drawing out the full consequences of this world-view. In the chapters which follow, then, I shall attempt to develop its contours in greater depth and scope.

Those who stand within the Calvinist tradition, I take it, commit themselves to pursuing Christian scholarship within this reformational, restorationist, or resurrectionist position. This remains a matter of ongoing reformation, however, in such institutions of Christian higher education as Potchefstroom, Calvin, and the Institute for Christian Studies — just as it lingers on as the historic legacy of the Free University of Amsterdam.

**CRITIQUE**

In retrospect, the following critical comments are applicable to the first four positions reviewed above. All four involve a dual normativity, which betrays or at least compromises the Biblical exhortation against every sort of divided allegiance. They lend a certain legitimacy, furthermore, to viewing some sectors
of life, including scholarship, as either sinful or natural or unredeemed. Accordingly, in these views there is a severely limited acknowledgment of the effects of evil in the world, as well as of the renewing grace of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ. They therefore also impose unwarranted restrictions upon the field of Christian scholarship. The alternative view, moving out from the fifth position, as elaborated in the upcoming chapters, aims at overcoming these dualist problems by proposing a more unified perspective on Christian scholarship.
II FOUR CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

MORE OF THE SAME
The five views sketched in chapter one have their long and deep roots in the history of the Christian tradition in the western world, though they continue to bear their fruits in academic circles today. This chapter will deal with the same basic issues in some of their more contemporary forms. A measure of overlap between these two overviews will become apparent. Perhaps the most significant historico-philosophical difference between the approaches sketched in these two chapters lies in this: The first five are outgrowths in various ways of the longstanding synthesis of Christian and Greek thought going back to the second century. The four views, to which we now turn, reflect the influence of the second crucial synthetic movement in western Christianity — the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. These four are therefore definable more clearly in terms of the Kantian categories of “pure” and “practical reason”. His dualist reconstruction of the field of knowledge forms the background for these more current perspectives. Their proponents, mostly evangelical Christian scholars, all walk in the shadow of Kant, the maker of the modern mind. Following his lead, whether consciously or otherwise, they fall with him into the all too familiar trap of dualist thinking, erecting a dichotomy between science and the Bible, between so-called facts and values.

Fortunately, here as before, we encounter a happy exception. The fourth position differs essentially from the first three, just as the fifth position did in the earlier survey. It therefore also opens up some very promising opportunities for developing an integrally coherent view of Christian scholarship.

Let us now focus on these four contemporary views on the relationship between Biblical revelation and Christian scholarship.

COMPARTMENTALISTS
First, there is the “compartmentalist” view. Advocates of this view choose quite explicitly to operate in two universes of discourse. They acknowledge two norms, one for their faith-life and another for their rational inquiry as scientists. Religion is one thing, it is argued, and rigorous intellectual scholarship quite
another. Although they co-exist in the same person, they are kept separate. Appeal is sometimes made to the old adage that “Good fences make good neighbours”. Such scholars may be devout worshippers on Sunday, and then plunge themselves with equal devotion into the secular affairs of the university on Monday. After all, as the familiar line goes, “East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet”.

As Christian persons such scholars may hold confessionally to some form of creationism, while at the same time propounding a form of evolutionism in their scientific methodologies. As a member of the Christian community one believes in the resurrection of Christ as being indispensable to religious faith, while yet as a reputable theologian, committed to the historico-critical method, he insists that the question of the reality of this cardinal event lies outside the purview of his theoretical enterprise. The most he can therefore say historically about it is that some people (the apostles) clearly believed it and acted accordingly.

To all outward appearances, such scholars have learned to live well with such contradictions. They even claim to be at peace with themselves. They are, however, according to Bonhoeffer, “men of eternal conflict”. Yet the conflict never seems to erupt into an open clash of convictions. Serving “two masters” seems to come quite naturally to these people. Yet, to use a Barthian expression, it remains an “impossible possibility”: possible in that some obviously try it; impossible in the sense that no one can make it come off successfully.

CONCORDISTS

Second, we move on to the “concordist” position. “Concordists” accept basically the same starting-point as “compartmentalists” — namely, the reality of two realms, one for Biblical faith and another for scientific rationality. There is one important difference, however. The “concordist” wishes fervently to affirm the non-contradictory nature of this duality. He senses real tension between what he experiences as Christian values, on the one hand, and as scientific facts, on the other. Therefore he expends great energy in seeking to forge a union of the two. His aim is to harmonize the two, to seek their reconciliation. He often argues, accordingly, that the Bible and science supplement or even complement each other like the two halves which make up a whole.

Often this method degenerates into frantic and incredibly far-fetched
attempts to uncover scientific evidence to prove that the Bible is right after all. Sometimes with evangelistic, though mistaken zeal, such “concordists” reduce science to an apologetic enterprise designed to convince the critics of Christianity that the Bible is indeed true and trustworthy. However laudable these intentions, they are bound to remain unconvincing. For, as Calvin says, Scripture is “self-authenticating”. One cannot erect Christian faith upon rational argumentation or scientific evidence. Kant, in his own way, would concur in this judgment, as would also Kuyper, as emerges clear by his disputes with the Princeton school of apologetics. Within the “concordist” position there are, therefore, subtle pressures which compel it to reconsider its advocacy of a dual normativity. Dualist premises can never yield the much desired unified view of Christian scholarship.

EXTERNALISTS

Third, we turn to the “externalist” approach. In moving from the “cornpartmentalist” view through the “concordist” view toward the “externalist” view, one senses a movement in the direction of bringing Biblical faith and Christian scholarship closer together. The view at hand succeeds no further, however, than drawing the two into a kind of external connection. It falls short of an integrally holist perspective.

Within the Reformed tradition, at least, “externalists” often stake their case on an appeal to the doctrine of common grace. Common grace, they argue, creates a measure of common ground among members of the scientific community. There scholars with sharply differing faith commitments can nevertheless stand together and share a certain limited, yet real fund of insights. Within this common arena, though value systems may differ greatly, facts are facts for all alike.

Within this school of thought there is no real expectation of arriving at a distinctively and thoroughly Christian scholarship. For the methods of science are taken to be objective in nature and verifiable by the common laws of logic and experimental procedures. Its methods are standard and function in a religiously neutral way. Therefore science _qua_ science, at the core of its operations, neither can nor may be concerned with questions of basic presuppositions, principles, perspectives, or purposes. Strictly pragmatic and positivist considerations must control input and output, all geared to their
predictability value.

Recently, as is well-known, this “externalist” view as held by Christian scholars, together with the “objectivity” myth as held by their secular counterparts, have come under frontal assault by the revolutionary work of Kuhn and others. In its traditional form, however, “externalists” hold that religious differences in scholarship show up only in matters of attitude toward science, motivations for engaging in science, interpretation of its results, its applications to life, and the general ethos surrounding the scientific enterprise. At bottom the Christian religion and hard-core science enjoy only an external relationship. Faith does not affect the internal operations of the scientific method.

**INTEGRALISTS**

**Finally,** we come to the “integralist” approach. Those standing in this tradition call for the inner reformation not only of theology, but of philosophy as well and all the other sciences. In a holist way the entire scientific enterprise, from its very foundations up through all its structures and functions, must be liberated from the stranglehold of alien ideologies and be restored as an avenue of Kingdom service. Nothing less than Scripturally-directed scholarship, in its total extent and in all its parts, is worthy of the Lord of life and learning.

On this view the claims of Scripture rest upon every academic endeavour in a radical, integral, and comprehensive way. This holds for the full sweep of Christian scholarship — its scientific presuppositions, its over-arching philosophy, its guiding principles, methodologies, interpretations, and applications. Such is the path of academic sanctification which Christian scholars are called to walk. This vision beckons us to develop a Biblically illumined ontology, anthropology, epistemology, and praxology which is true to God’s good order for creation and which answers to our calling in the world for such a time as this.

We must not delude ourselves. This is no easy undertaking. Christian scholars do not automatically embrace Christian paradigms of reality. In fact, this view of science often meets with stiff resistance. Its delightfully heavy demands deter many from tackling it. Nevertheless, in an age such as ours, such a reformational model remains a crucially important way to “work out (our)
salvation with fear and trembling” in the assurance that “God is at work in (us), both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). If in obedience we set ourselves to this task, then, surprised by the joy of it all, we will discover the light of God’s Word shining as “a lamp to our feet” and “a light upon our path” (Psalm 119:105) as we traverse the various fields of Christian scholarship. Then too we will experience the exhilarating challenge of trying to live up to Kuyper’s memorable confession, “There is not a single square inch of the entire cosmos of which Christ, the sovereign Lord of all, does not say, This is Mine!”.

CONCLUSIONS
Outside the circles of Kuyperian and neo-Kuyperian influence one looks in vain for solid evidence of this “integralist” perspective. Many evangelical scholars may pay lip service to it. Many, perhaps even most Reformed scholars, may claim it as their working principle. All too often, however, one finds that they are talking a better game than they are playing. Of all of us it is true, of course, that our performance record falls short of our profession. But if the persistent will is present to play this serious game within an “integralist” framework-of-reference, then we are well on the way. And the stakes are high.

It remains, therefore, to get on with the game in an earnestly happy mood, to play it fair and square (honest to God’s Word), and thus to cash in on its rewarding potentials. Accordingly we turn now in the upcoming chapters to working out some of the basic implications of the “reformational” position (the fifth from chapter one) and the “integralist” position (the fourth from this chapter) — both of which point in the same direction.
III THE WORD OF GOD

SOLA SCRIPTURA
In seeking to arrive at greater clarity on the meaning of the Word of God we must turn to Scripture itself as our noetic starting-point. Given the reality of sin and its radical and sweeping effects upon our understanding, we must, with Calvin (Institutes, I, 6, 1), put on the “spectacles” of Scripture, and if seeing, make sure we are seeing aright. For Scripture is given as a pair of corrective lenses to restore our faulty and distorted spiritual eyesight, to redirect our misdirected vision on reality. As Paul tells us, “All Scripture is inspired of God, and is (therefore) profitable for instruction ... “ (II Timothy 3:16-17) — also indispensably profitable for instruction concerning the meaningfulness of God’s Word. We must, accordingly, enter upon this study via that epistemological doorway which is the Bible, the writings of the Old and the New Testament.

This is what the reformers had in mind in coining their password — sola Scriptura. They did not mean that only Scripture is the Word (revelation) of God. Such an interpretation would contradict everything Calvin says in the opening chapters of the Institutes. Rather, sola Scriptura is cast in the ablative case — by Scripture alone. For it is by Scripture alone that we come to know anew God’s handiwork in creation and his redeeming work in Jesus Christ.

We may recall with gratitude that this Biblical point of departure was firmly established in the sixteenth century prior to the dawning of the modern era. For in the aftermath of the eighteenth century Enlightenment a host of conflicting epistemological starting-points have been advanced. Idealists take as their normative presupposition (pre-sub-ponere) the autonomy of human subjective rationality. Empiricists and positivists begin axiomatically with the objective reality of the data at hand. Others proceed experientially from the depth levels of human religious consciousness. Still others place almost unbounded trust in scientific and historico-critical methods. In the midst of this cacophony of clashing approaches, the only viable noetic gateway into the arena of Christian scholarship remain the Scriptures.

Acting upon this conviction, I therefore now submit the following major thesis: Taking Scripture seriously as the Word of God leads us to recognize, on the basis
of Biblical revelation itself, that there is more to the Word of God than the Bible. Or stated differently: Taking Scripture seriously as the Word of God leads us to recognize that Scripture itself points to realities beyond itself which it also identifies as Word of God — namely, God’s Word for creation and his Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. Thus we come to see that the one Word of God comes to us in three forms or modes — creationally, inscripturated, and personified in the Messiah.

**ANTI-REDUCTIONISM**

It belongs to the very genius of the Reformed tradition that it has sought quite consistently to do justice to the Word of God in its full-orbed significance. In other traditions there are clear signs of a tendency to reduce the fulness of God’s Word to one or another of its manifestations. Classic liberals, for example, limit the idea of revelation (insofar as they retain it at all) to the historical rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. As the great master Teacher he exemplifies the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of men in whose footsteps we are to follow.

Though in a radically different way, the Neo-Orthodox tradition also reduces the Word of God in its fulness to the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. Since, according to Barth, revelation is by definition exclusively a “personal act” of God, the creation order and the Book are not revelatory in any direct sense. They serve only as “pointers” and “witnesses” to the once-and-for-all Word of God incarnate. The result is a radical Christomonism. Evangelical Christians tend to limit God’s Word to the Bible, with Jesus Christ viewed as personal Saviour and Lord and creation as the arena for the struggle between sin and grace. Naturalists, if conscious of revelation at all, restrict it to “mother nature” and her wonders. In each case the Word of God suffers a severe reduction, being reduced to either Christ or the Bible or creation.

The Reformed tradition has built-in safeguards against such reductionisms. The Belgic Confession in Article 11, for instance, speaks of “two Books”: the most elegant book of nature with its creatures great and small and the Book of the prophets and apostles. In all things pre-eminence belongs, moreover, to “the Word made flesh which dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). With that we are back at the three-fold Word of God, accommodated historically to our need, as disclosed in the unfolding Biblical story-line of creation, fall, and redemption, on the way to the consummation of all things in the end.
THREE-FOLD WORD

One point must be clear: This view offers no warrant for speaking of three Words of God. From beginning to end there is but one Word of God — a single message, a single divine will. God does not engage in “double talk” or “triple talk”. He is forever faithful to his Word. Nor does He “change his tune” along the way. The three-fold Word of God is like a triple variation on the same tune. Scripture points to the one Word, the constant and abiding revelation of God’s unchanging law for life in his world. That single Word manifests itself, however, in three forms or modes. Thus we arrive at the three-fold Word of God.

Perhaps I may be permitted a crude analogy. H2O represents water. We encounter water, however, in three states — liquid, solid, and gaseous. Yet, in whatever form, it is still always basically the same H2O, water.

So also with God’s Word. An abiding inner consistency runs through all three ways the Word comes to us. In his original and unretracted Word for creation God said, in effect, “I am your God, you be my people”. That same Word echoes through all the pages of Scripture. That same Word is also reiterated in a personified way in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. In this diversity of forms there is a unity of message. Calvin in his Institutes can therefore speak of Biblical revelation as a “republication” of God’s creational revelation. And in his commentary on the Psalms he holds that the psalmist’s references to the Word of God (debar) point forward to their fulfilment in the Word incarnate (logos).

A similar continuity is reflected in the law of God given through Moses to Israel on Mt. Sinai. The law was not “born” at Sinai. It did not originate there as something brand-new, unheard-of before a de novo divine pronouncement. Nor was it a super-added Word, creating a new and higher realm in our life relationships. It is closer to the truth to say that the law was “re-born” at Sinai. There God re-promulgated in another mode of communication his Word originally given in and with and for the creation. The will of God which in the beginning was intuitively present to human consciousness, and reinforced by that divine-human dialogue carried to human consciousness, and reinforced by that divine-human dialogue carried on while “walking together in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8), was at Sinai cast into tables of stone, then to find its way into
the written Torah. Paul in Romans 2:14-15 reflects on the response side of this truth when he says that when those “who have not the (written) law do by nature what the law requires ... they show that what the law requires is written (via creation) on their hearts ...”. There is therefore an unbreakable revelational bond which unifies the Word of God in its three-fold form.

ADVANTAGES
This Word-oriented view of revelation has the following advantages. First of all, it avoids the dualist tendencies which often burden the way many think, speak, and write about general and special revelation. Second, it replaces these rather abstract, purely formal and non-descript concepts with more vivid and concrete language drawn quite directly from Biblical revelation itself. After all, what is so general about general revelation? Is not general revelation (“the heavens declare the glory of God”) actually a very special sight to behold! And what is so special about special revelation? Is not special revelation (“the mighty saving acts of God in Jesus Christ”) generally meant for all people? Third, the idea of the three-fold Word does greater justice to the unity of God’s Word than is possible through the use of more traditional terminology.

There are, of course, still other ways to capture the basic ideas of revelation — for example, the concepts fundamental and redemptive revelation. This is I think a more meaningful formulation than that of general and special revelation. But, for the reasons given above, the idea of the one Word of God in its three-fold form appears to open up the most promising perspectives for articulating a Christian view of scholarship. Working this idea out involves no break with the Reformed tradition. Rather it is a further step in capitalizing upon its rich potentials — in keeping with the spirit of reformata semper reformanda est.

Let us, therefore, turn now to a sampling of Biblical teachings which point the way toward this doctrine of the Word of God. In the Old Testament already in a promissory way (Deuteronomy 8:3), and again in the New Testament in a fulfilling way (Matthew 4:4), we are confronted by this firm reminder, uttered by our Lord Himself, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”. What is involved in this expression “every word”? Pursuing this idea within the analogy Scripturae leads to a recognition of the three-fold Word of God — the creational Word, the Word written, and the incarnate Word. Let us then trace these Biblical pointers in that order.
CREATION
First, there is the creational Word. Echoing and re-echoing throughout Genesis 1 is the refrain, “And God said ... “. Repeatedly God puts his dynamic, powerful, creative Word to his newly emergent world. Time and again, in orderly fashion, fantastic things happen. This divine speech is not mere wishful thinking. For what God says, happens. This should alert us to the Biblical meaning of Word, which is more than the customary notion of an audible sound, a vibration of air waves passing, say, from mouth to ear. In Scripture words and works are near equivalents. Recall the frequent parallel statements in the psalms, “The word of the Lord ... , and his work ...”. In creational revelation we encounter worded works, and working words. Scripture therefore calls into question the western distinction between words and deeds, as though the former were empty, impotent, and harmless, while deeds are all that matter.

The Genesis story is reaffirmed by the testimony of Psalm 33:6, 9: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth”. In God’s challenge to Job there are similar allusions to the power of God's Word, bringing order and setting bounds to the cosmos. There we meet the God who “determined its measurements”, who “prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no further, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’ “, who “commanded the morning since (its) days began” (Job 38:4-15).

The psalms are replete with such references to the Word of God for creation. Note Psalm 119:38: “Forever, o Lord, thy word is firmly fixed in the heavens”. Or Psalm 147:15-18: “He sends forth his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly ... He sends forth his word and melts (the snow and ice); he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow”. Again Psalm 148:7, 8: “Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy winds fulfilling his command!”. Some have ascribed such expressions to poetic license, reducing them to mere figures of speech. To do so is, however, to undercut the reality of the Biblical idea of God’s Word and to rob it of its power.

From these and similar passages it is clear that we should avoid calling creation
itself the Word of God. For such talk carries with it pantheistic overtones. God’s Word is not identical with creation. For, “heaven and earth may pass away” (Matthew 24:35), but the Word of the Lord abides forever. Thus Scripture distinguishes between God’s Word and his creation. Clarity therefore demands that we speak of God’s Word for creation. The creation is indeed revelatory. For “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). It is revelatory, however, in a responsive, reflective, indirect way. As God’s creatures great and small answer to the claim of his Word upon them, each after its kind, we then from these responses come to understand the way God’s Word holds for each of them in an individualized way — for example his Word for falling rocks, for chirping birds, for child development, for married couples. As a shaft of light, passing through a prism, gets refracted into a diversified spectrum of colours, so God’s one Word addresses all his varied creatures. It gets concretized, however, as the psalmists indicate, according to the very special structure and function of each creature and according to the various life-relationships of mankind as imagers of God in his world. The one Word is revealed as a richly diversified cluster of Words. The central love command, for example, lays its claim upon us as a wide-ranging set of commandments for our varied life situations. Similarly, the single cultural mandate gets concretized in a mandate for friendship, a mandate for worship, a mandate for public justice, a mandate for Christian scholarship, etc. The same holds true for God’s one Word in its multiform Words.

Moving along, let us look now at God’s Word for creation as disclosed in the New Testament. John 1:1-3 is a classic passage. In phrases which seem to recapitulate Genesis 1, we read: “In the beginning was the Word. All things were made through (the idea of mediation) him (personal!), and without him was not anything made that was made”. Turning to Hebrews 1:1-3, we read that “in these last days (God) has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom (mediation again) he also created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power “. Thus Christ (not Atlas) sustains the cosmos. This is also the clear witness of Paul: “For in (Christ) all things were created ... All things (ta panta) were created through him (the Mediator of creation) and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-20). All this is reaffirmed in the great faith chapter of Hebrews: “By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God ...” (11:3).
In its testimony to God’s Word for creation Scripture reaches a kind of climax in the second letter of Peter 3:5-7. Peter is there answering scoffers who, with an appeal to an early version of the uniformitarian theory, mocked the idea of divine intervention in the life of the world. “They deliberately ignore this fact,” writes Peter, “that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, ... (and) by that same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men”. According to Scripture, then, from beginning to end our world is unthinkable apart from the creational Word of God. The structures of creation are dependent upon God’s form-giving and direction-setting Word for creation. Our societal orders must accordingly answer to and be brought in line with God’s ordering Word for society.

Moreover, what we call scientific laws are no more than scholarly responses to the way God’s Law-Word (Words) holds for the world. The laws of science have a deeply religious dimension which is regularly overlooked. They are but human formulations, with a secondary and contingent status. For, rightly understood, they point beyond themselves to a creational order which establishes their very possibility and maintains the stable and predictable order of things upon which they are based. Scientific laws are therefore disciplined formulations of the way we experience the holding power of God’s Word for all created reality. Christian scholarship is called to open up these Biblical horizons.

**SCRIPTURE**

Thus the creational Word gives meaning to our life in the world, fixing its structures and functions and setting its direction. This is God’s original, foundational, and abiding Word — which would have been adequate for all time had it not been for the radical and sweeping effects of sin. But now, to counteract the vitiating consequences of our fall, God republished his Word redemptively in the Scriptures. We now have his Word before us in lingual form — the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek of the original text, translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, including now for the past fifty years, into Afrikaans. God’s Word in its written form has been given to redirect our misdirected lives. Since the spritual misdirection of sin also rebounds perversely upon the good order of creational life, the inscripturated Word also leads to the reordering of our disordered life-relationships and the reformation of our deformed academic
enterprises.

The Word written, like the Word incarnate, is fully and truly divine and fully and truly human. This is the mystery of God’s Word in creaturely form. The Bible is accordingly God’s Word in the words of men. When therefore we read “Moses said” and “God said”, practically in the same breath, this is all the same. Such statements reflect not contradiction, but Biblical consistency. Such insights are behind the reformational confession of the inspiration, authority, infallibility, and normativity of the Scriptures. It arises out of the Biblical witness that “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (II Peter 1:21).

These matters are really not in dispute among us. They therefore need no lengthy argumentation. At bottom, even the contemporary “battle for the Bible”, upon careful analysis, turns out to be not as much a question of defending the integrity of Scripture as confusion over the relationship between the Bible and creational revelation. Too often it appears that the reliability and normativity of the latter is being discredited. The result is an attempt to derive from Scripture scientific data lying outside its intent and purpose. Thus one overloads the Biblical circuit and the fuses begin to blow.

CHrist
We come now to God’s original, abiding, decisive, and final Word for the world — the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. Earlier we noted certain passages which highlight Christ as the mediating Word of God for creation. Now we focus on this fact of revelation: That Word, of which John speaks (1:1-3) personally and mediatonally in the context of creation, the Word “became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth ...” (14).

To meet us in our need God steadily drives his Word home closer and closer to us. Through Moses already God revealed to his people that his commandment “is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). If that was already true for Israel, how much more so now for us?
The impact of God’s Word for creation is still as vivid as the latest sunrise and the next sunset. Yet this is now radically obscured by our sinful propensity to “suppress the truth” of God’s “eternal power and deity” in creation, exchanging the truth for a lie (Romans 1:18-23). In his condescending grace God then republished his transcendent Word in creaturely form, in the form of a Book, black on white. He, as it were, placed it in our laps. But God goes not only a second mile with us, but a third mile as well. He brought his Word as close as possible. The Word became embodied in human nature, born of a woman, incarnate, personified, like unto us in all things, except for sin — all this in Christ Jesus. In Him the “Wisdom” of Proverbs, which cries aloud in the streets, was fulfilled in the “Logos” of John’s gospel.

Christ is God’s ultimate and all-embracing Word for the world. That incorporated Word, living, dying, resurrected, and ascended, is what the New Testament is all about. On one of its very last pages, as a final scene in the unfolding drama of the End Times, we meet the victorious Lord mounted on a white horse. In recording this vision John makes special mention of his name: “He has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself, ... and the name by which he is called is the Word of God!” (Revelation 19:12-13).

Christ, the incarnate Word of God, is now the Mediator of both creation and redemption. As we have seen, He is the key to the meaning of the world. He is also the heart of the Biblical message. Referring to the Old Testament writings, He says, “It is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39). “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets” — as risen Lord in-cognito conversing with his disheartened disciples along the road to Emmaus — “He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). Gradually his followers picked up the clue. For we read of Philip, sharing a ride with the Ethiopian nobleman, who was puzzling over the meaning of Isaiah 53, that “beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus” (Acts 8:35).

**SCHOLARSHIP**

Here then is the Christo-centric basis for Christian scholarship. Recognizing him as the key to God’s Word for creation and as the heart of his Word inscripturated, we can begin to “lead every thought captive in obedience to Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5). By the impinging power of his creational Word, God in his preserving grace still maintains the structured order of the cosmos. This makes
science possible. By the light of the written Word He redirects our hearts and minds and wills unto renewed academic obedience. In the Word who now claims “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18) He answers the question: In whose service do we stand?

Perhaps then the following can serve as a compressed definition of Christian scholarship in its various branches: a) seeking to discern the norms of God’s Word for creation as they hold for our life together in his world; b) illumined and redirected by God’s Word in the Scriptures; c) under the rule of God’s Word in our Lord Jesus Christ; and d) in the service of his coming kingdom.
IV THE CREATION ORDER

CHARTER
The creation order is the permanent and normative environment for man’s life in the world. It is also the abiding foundation for all scholarship. For the various scholarly disciplines — physics, biology, psychology, sociology, economics, etc. — open the doors to theoretical inquiry into the various ordered facets of created reality. In the beginning God by his Word called into being not a chaos, but a cosmos — an integrally coherent, harmoniously inter-related world order. By that same Word, despite sin, and as a manifestation of his preserving grace, God continues to sustain that order. It is our calling to see to it that the structures of creation answer obediently to God’s structures for creation. God’s faithfulness to his Word for creation, maintaining its orderliness, eliminating arbitrariness, is the reliable charter of all scholarship. Its regularity makes the sciences possible. Its constancy lends identity and integrity to each discipline. Its interlaced unity makes inter-disciplinary studies possible. All scholarship, with its various objects of investigation, is securely anchored in the ontic order of creation.

STRUCTURE / DIRECTION
By the impinging power of his Word for creation God maintains his claim upon all men — scholars included. The creation order therefore holds for Christian and non-Christian scholarship alike. Structurally we have all things in common, for we all live together in one world, God’s world, which is subject to his creational laws. By the holding power of his Word there are states-of-affairs which impinge themselves upon all researchers — for instance, at sea level water boils at 100°C and objects fall at the rate of 32 feet the first second, malnutrition results in mental retardation, and human life begins at conception. Christian distinctiveness in scholarship must come to expression precisely in those aspects of reality which we have in common with other kinds of scholarship — the same fields of research, the same disciplines — not merely in certain special exercises such as Bible reading and prayer.

In, under, with and through these structural and functional commonalities, however, there runs a directional-spiritual dimension of difference which
manifests itself in radically antithetical ways of practising science. Christian scholars are therefore often tempted to begin their reflection with redemption. Methodologically, however, this is a faulty approach. In the light of Scripture, the creation order stands as the fixed point-of-departure. We must start where the Bible starts, with the good order of creation, which God still upholds, and then follow the unfolding Biblical story-line through the fall to redemption on the way to the consummation. We must not be too hasty in hypassifiz creation in a dubious eagerness to get on to the cross and resurrection. For, as has been said, if we lose sight of the meaning of creation, then in the end we will also lose sight of the meaning of the new creation as well as everything in between.

The threat to the Biblical doctrine of creation is not illusory. Theologians in Hitler’s Germans during the 1930’s drastically distorted the Biblical idea of creation order in support of their “Blut and Boden” ideology, proclaiming the superiority the Aryan race. Understandably, therefore, reaction set in. Influential thinkers in many Christian circles turned against the idea of creation ordinances. Such an ayes sion is still with us today. This reactionary movement, however understandable, must not, however, be granted a nortnatit e status which is determinative of Christian thought. For then Christian scholarship gets robbed of its firm foundation.

In seeking to gain insight into Ott creation order we need not, as some seem to suggest, transport ourselves back into the original pre-lapsarian creational situation. Actually this is an historical impossibility. The original s; ate of rectitude lies beyond our reach. But the original Word for ordered life in the creation still holds. It continues to lac its claim upon us today. Scripture redirects us to sense its constant holding power and calls us to an obedient response to it. By the light of Scripture, therefore, we are summoned to discern its abiding norms.

**STARTING-POINTS**

In terms of our present mandate, therefore, we have more than enough to work with. From the Genesis record, as elaborated in the rest of Scripture, at least three points emerge whith we must keep clearly in mind.

a) God is the Initiator and Origin of all things. In the words of
Augustine, “you made us for yourself, and we can find no rest until we rest in you”.

b) Created reality came into being ex nihilo. Its beginnings and continued existence are mediated by the Word of God. It came forth, however, not out of God, but “out of nothing”. The world is, therefore, sacred, but it is not divine. In the words of my childhood catechism lesson: “Question: What does it mean to create? Answer: To bring forth something out of nothing by the act of God's creative will”.

c) What was created by the good pleasure of God was an ordered cosmos. Each creature was made “after its kind”. Viewed from the response side, this cosmos, fallen into disarray by mankind’s disobedience, is the very ordered reality which God yet so loved that He gave his Son to redeem it (John 3:16).

This we now learn by means of the Scriptures. Donning these “spectacles” we can begin anew to see how God’s inscripturated Word sheds its light upon our world and to hear anew how God calls his creation to order. Let us then listen in and eavesdrop on its testimony, so that we may overhear what is going on there.

I propose now to develop this theme of 012 creation order further under the following three headings: first, the nuclear tasks assigned to mankind from the beginning; second, the historical process of differentiation in the opening up of these tasks; and third, some historical observations moving out beyond the Biblical drama.

**NUCLEAR TASKS**
In giving mankind dominion over the earth as his stewards, God assigned us a cluster of core tasks. They stand not only as imperatives, but also as a benediction. Taken together they come down to exercising tender loving care. In traditional terminology these tasks are known as the cultural mandate. Scripture leads us to recognize further that this comprehensive mandate gets concretized in a rich assortment of mandates. Viewed from the revelational side, the one Word of God for creation gets refracted into a spectrum of richly diversified Words, which in principle cover the full range of our life activities. God’s full-orbed Will, as addressed concretely to our various life-relationships, is reflected in the early pages of Genesis.
Note the following Biblical pointers. There is a Word of God for marriage: God brought Adam and Eve together and said, “Be fruitful and multiply” — which nuclear calling implies the familial task of nurture. There is a Word of God for labour: “Till the soil”. There is the intimation of a governing task: “Oversee the garden”. In a distant way Genesis also points toward a learning task: Adam is called to name the animals, each after its kind and according to its nature. Obviously this activity falls short of scientific classification into genus and species. Yet some sort of very down-to-earth analytic sorting-out process is going on there. Finally there is a call to worship, to cultic fellowship, in what seems to have been Adam’s habitual practice of walking with God in the cool of the day.

All these are obviously pre-adumbrations of a greater vocational clarity which would later emerge. Moreover, as with all Scripture, they are spelled out in pre-theoretical language. One need not assume, furthermore, that Genesis intends to offer an exhaustive list of all our cultural tasks. They are, rather, cross-cut samples of a fuller range of callings which was eventually to unfold with time. It should also be noted that these blessings, clothed as commands, are couched in concepts familiar to the original recipients of this revelation, Israel, an agrarian and pastoral people. Nevertheless, though accommodated to the mind-set of farmers and shepherds, the Genesis narrative also speaks normatively to twentieth-century people living in a scientific and technological society. That is the kind of Book the Bible is. While the forms of our call to obedience and the manner of our response to the Word of God may and must change to meet the demands of changing cultures, its governing norms are ever binding upon us.

**MARRIAGE / DIVORCE**

This is clear from the Biblical witness on marriage and divorce. Much of modern thought regards marriage as a product of cultural evolution. Mankind allegedly devised successive marital structures — matriarchal, patriarchal, and communal structures, until at last arriving at the present family plan”, which is now in the process of making way for more promiscuous patterns. In contradiction to this, Scripture affirms a marriage ructure anchored from the beginning in the creation order. When Jesus’ critics appealed to the concession granted by Moses, allowing for divorce under certain abnormal circumstances, because of the hardness of heart which wreaks havoc in many marriages, Jesus makes a more ultimate appeal. He
reaches back to an original creational ordinance, affirming its perpetual validity. “From the beginning it was not so,” He says, that divorce, as a second best way out of an untenable situation, represents the Will of God. Rather, marriage, as a bi-unitary and exclusive covenant between a man and a woman, is meant to be for good and for keeps. This is the norm, rooted in the creation order.

THE STATE
Take another issue, the nettlesome problem of the state. In the light of Scripture, where are we to locate the origin and basis of civil government? Christian scholarship has across the centuries generated three fundamentally divergent points-of-view. These three play on one or another of the central Biblical themes of creation, fall, and redemption — but quite differently. Let us take them in reverse order.

One view, accentuated in modern times, seeks to lay the foundations for state life in redemption. The redeeming grace of God in Jesus Christ, which is embodied in the church, must find its analogy in the state. Christocracy is the key concept. Christ, the Light of the world, which shines in the church, must also be reflected in the state — as the rays of the sun are reflected by the moon. Behind this view is a theological idea which collapses redemption back into creation. Redemption and creation then come to be viewed as dialectical counterparts inherent in the world order.

A second view traces the state back to the fall. Accordingly, civil government is viewed as a divine agency for counteracting the effects of sin in the world. It is a providential means for curbing and restraining evil in society. From its inception, therefore, political life lies under the dark cloud of sinfulness. On this highly negative view Christians are well advised to avoid involvement in such public affairs.

The third view, in keeping with the basic line of reasoning in this chapter, holds that state life is anchored in the creational order. Governing is a divinely ordained task given with man’s original mandate. We must, of course, distinguish between the state “as it was meant to be” and the state “as we know it today”. But that holds for every other institution in society as well. For sin has intervened; but preserving and redeeming grace is also a reality. Governmental
service was from the beginning, by divine intention, and still is today, in
actuality, a legitimate form of obedient living. Given the finished creation as
narrated in Genesis 1-2, no new structures were later added. The only
question left is this: Whether our structures of government answer faithfully
to God’s structures for government. Honest reflection compels us to offer a
mixed response. This mixture, both affirmative and negative responses, is
woven into the fabric of the Biblical witness. Romans 13 presents a normative
image of the state, the state at its best, the state as it is meant to be. Revelation
13, on the contrary, pictures an anti-normative state, the state at its worst, the
state as we often confront it in reality. The structural givens which underlie this
antithetical development are, however, already embedded in the creational order.

DIFFERENTIATION
God did not, of course, create the Reformed churches of South Africa or North
America. But God did create mankind as worshipping creatures. In the course
of historical developments that worshipping task has taken on the various
ecclesiastical forms as we know them today. The same historical unfolding process is
evident in the life of the home, the university, business, and art. Christian
scholars are, accordingly, called to take history seriously. For, as has been said,
they who forget the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes. This is true, more
importantly, because history is God’s way with his world. It is God’s way, through
the ups and downs in the course of events, of unfolding the potentials of his
creation unto the final coming of his kingdom.

There is therefore in history a discernible process of differentiation, an
opening-up of the seminal potentials given originally with the creation order.
To use a crude example — a certain brand of salt runs this advertisement: Nature
puts the flavour in, it takes salt to bring it out. So by analogy, creation puts the
potentials in, it takes history to bring them out. Integral to the movements of
history is human culture. By exercising culturally formative powers in
response to our divinely appointed cultural tasks, mankind shapes a variety
of societal orders and civilizations. These traditions, emerging out of past
cultures, mould the present and help make future development possible.

OLD TESTAMENT
We catch a glimpse of this development in the opening-up process of creation
order as re-enacted in the Biblical drama. In the light of the successive ages in the history of revelation we discern an unfolding process in which the original core tasks gradually come into sharper focus. In the beginning, it seems, all those tasks were concentrated in the family circle. We must, therefore, distinguish their genetic origin in the family from their normed identity. For those varied tasks are not meant to be permanently clustered in the home. Work, governing, learning, and worship, for example, also have an integrity of their own. We see them steadily assuming their own uniquely differentiated place in life. Take the example of a bud: At first all the petals are clustered together tightly, but gradually each individual petal opens up and comes to its own expression.

Let us now retrace this process of historical differentiation as sketched in passing upon the unfolding pages of Biblical revelation. In the opening chapter; already we detect its Vocational beginnings. We meet Cain the farmer, Abel the herdsman, Nimrod the hunter, Tubal the metal worker, and Tubal-Cain the maker of musical instruments. Yet much later in Abraham the picture is still largely undifferentiated. He combines within his daily routine a large-as-life array of tasks. He is husband, father, educator of his sons, worker digging wells for his flocks, chief liturgete erecting altars for worship, and land developer: as patriarch he is the political head of his clan; and then we meet General Abraham the commander-in-chief of his army of 318 men conducting a war of liberation.

A similar undifferentiated role is played by Samuel. He is the prophet who brings the Word of the Lord to his people, the priest of the house of Levi who offers sacrifices for the people, and as judge the one who renders kingly service in making his annual circuits through the land adjudicating problems.

With the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, however, we encounter a clearly discernible differentiation of tasks and offices into societal institutions. The office of prophet, priest, and king become clearly delineated, with definite lines of demarcation marking them off from one another. There is Abiathar carrying on his priestly functions in the tabernacle, while across the way King David occupies the throne, and in walks Nathan the prophet to deliver his stinging rebuke. While many Biblical scholars pass a negative judgment on these developments, I see this division of labours as a normative development upon the nuclear tasks given with the creational order. Implicit in this process of
differentiation is the idea later formulated in the principle of sphere-sovereignty. This idea seeks to honour the identity and integrity of the various divinely ordained tasks and offices in our life-relationships. These differentiated spheres must be viewed, however, as standing in a co-existing and pro-existing relationship to each other. This idea is captured in the principle of sphere universality, emphasizing the partnership role of these spheres, making community possible.

The normative character of these developments is reflected in the divine judgment which descends upon those who violate it. When King Saul takes the priestly task of offering sacrifice into his own hands, he is dethroned with the stern reminder, “To obey is better than sacrifice…” (I Samuel 15:22). When King Uzzah repeats this mistake, he emerges from the temple as a leper (II Chronicles 26:16-21). When King Jerobeam (it appears that civil rulers have the greatest propensity for abusing their power) seeks to enforce false worship before an unauthorized altar, he is struck with paralysis, and recovers only through the intervention of the prophet (I Kings 13:1-10). Calvin in his commentary on this passage sees a parallel between that situation in Israel and conditions in the Germany and England of his day. There too a troublesome fusion had developed between the kingly and priestly offices, leading to a coalition of state and church. In Germany this took the form of “princely favour”, the political principle of the Lutheran reformation whereby the religion of the ruler became the official religion of his province embodied in an established church. In England the crown assumed headship over both state and church. This Calvin deplores. These violations reflect retrogressive developments, standing in the way of a proper differentiation of offices, and thus represent an assault upon the principle of sphere-sovereignty.

INTER-TESTAMENT
We turn now to the so-called “silent 400 years” between Malachi and Matthew, which are “silent” only in terms of Biblical revelation. During this tumultuous Inter-Testamentary period, having lost its monarchy after the Babylonian captivity, Israel became a predominantly priestly community under the rule of foreign powers. From 198 B.C. onward this remnant of the Hebrew people experienced ruthless oppression under Syrian domination, perhaps matched only by the holocaust of the twentieth century. In reaction the Maccabean Rebellion erupted in 167 B.C., led by the Hasmoneons, a priestly family — initiated by Father Mattathias, then carried on successively by his sons, Judas,
Jonathan, and Simon. Finally in 142 B.C. they achieved liberation. As a
crowning event Simon the Jewel was made governor, leading thus to an
amalgamation of the priestly and kingly offices, a civil and ecclesiastical
coalition.

Standing alone this series of events would already make an interesting case
study. But it has wider implications. Its ramifications reach into the New
Testament, to the trial of Jesus, when He is hailed before Annas and
Caiaphas, the high priests. Such passing of a civil sentence by cultic leaders
stands as a travesty on justice, an anti-normative act against the
background of Old Testament developments. It represents a violation of the
integrity of these two offices and of the emerging idea of sphere sovereignty. We
see once again how distorted societal structures can have deleterious effects upon
the fundamental direction of human actions.

NEW TESTAMENT
Having entered the New Testament era, we see Jesus in the gospels
confronted by his critics. Seeking as so often to entrap him, they ask, “Is it
lawful to give tribute to Caesar:” Now at last, they think they have Jesus
captured on the horns of a dilemma. For whichever way He turns, He is in
trouble. An affirmative answer would incur the hatred of the Jewish people. A
negative answer would well lead to Roman reprisals. Asking for a coin and
pointing to Caesar’s image on it, Jesus escapes their trap by answering “Give unto
Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s” (Matthew 22:15-22).
Christians have often interpreted this saying along dualist
lines, as though one
part of life belongs to the civil authorities, and another to God. This leads clearly
to a sacred/secular dichotomy. Consistent with the comprehensive witness of
Scripture, however, Jesus’ teaching actually comes down to something like
this: Give unto God what is His, namely, total allegiance. Then, under God, give
unto Caesar what is his — no more, no less. By extension this would mean: Give to
parents what is theirs, to church officers what is theirs, to teachers what is theirs.
God alone has absolute sovereignty. All earthly offices have only limited
authority. This reflects once again the idea of the differentiation of offices.

This opening-up process is recalled dramatically in the Biblical record of the life of
the early church. At first ecclesiastical office was concentrated in the twelve
apostles. But they became overburdened. As church life branched out, a division
of labours emerged. The apostolic office gradually became differentiated into the familiar threefold office of deacon, elder, and minister.

Look at one more case, one which emerged in the Corinthian church. This congregation, it seems, was Paul’s constant problem-child. One of the disputes which arose there was over good, and property. Corinthian Christians were hailing each other before the pagan judges to settle differences. What are you doing! says Paul. You cannot expect to get a Christian hearing in a pagan court. Is there not a better way? Is there not a wise and trusted man among you who can adjudicate these matters? Paul appears to be calling for a Christian ombudsman, a Christian court of appeals (I Corinthians 6:1-7). It is significant to note that Paul does not say, Bring these civil suits before the church council. For these issues do not belong properly to the office of elder. Implicitly, therefore, Paul is appealing to the differentiated character of ecclesiastical and civil jurisdictions going back to the creation order.

WESTERN HISTORY
With this we close the book on this Biblical overview. We turn now to the history of the Christian community in the western world since the end of the apostolic era. I shall focus on two developments, offering a few comments on each.

CHURCH / STATE
Let us look first at the perennial church-state struggle of ancient and medieval times. The Edict of 313 A.D. conferred upon Christianity the dubious honour of becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. Within a generation Christians had moved from the catacombs to the throne. Now an unholy wedlock was entered into between church and state. Thus the Constantinian-Medieval era was ushered in. The Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire.

Several years ago during the counter-culture days, a colleague of mine, studying on a Californian campus, became involved in a heated conversation with Marxist students. When they detected that he was a Christian, they turned their robust analysis of history upon him with these words: “You Christians have had your chance since 313 A.D., and you blew it. Now it’s our turn!”
These Marxist students were not all wrong. For the Holy Roman Empire rested upon a confusion of offices. Imperial power and papal pretensions were brought together in such a way as to set the scene for a centuries-long conflict between church and state. This fierce struggle cast its spell over the emergence of the west. Princes appointed and deposed priests. Priests manipulated and excommunicated princes. At best these two great magnitudes in society arrived at a policy of shared jurisdiction. Beneath the surface of the struggle lay the undergirding nature/grace dogma of leading Christian thinkers. These developments clearly mark a departure from the norms of the creational order. For centuries they retarded a healthy unfolding of differentiated tasks and offices in the life of the Christian community. They represent a violation of the idea of sphere-sovereignty (healthy differentiation), and consequently also of the idea of sphere-universality (healthy community).

The Reformation introduced the partial and temporary restoration of a societal order which answers more obediently to the norms of the creation order. In breaking with the dualist medieval church-state construct, the Reformation (especially in its Calvinist wing) created a break-through toward a more differentiated pattern, though it fell short of a consistent follow-through. Unfortunately, however, this initiative was largely undercut by the scholasticism which set in within one century. Instead of building on the foundations laid by Luther and Calvin, and somewhat later by Althusius, the early heirs of the Reformation reverted to Constantinian, Augustinian, and Thomist models of societal life.

Thus the idea of sphere-sovereignty/sphere-universality lay dormant until the neo-Reformation movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Lutheran two-realm theory of society, as a revision of the medieval dualist view, survived more strongly than the incipiently holist/differentiated model of Calvin. In Calvin’s Geneva the relationship of the consistory, the town council, the schools, and the Academy reflected a renewed movement in the direction of a more faithful response to creational norms. This promising movement was, however, largely sidetracked in the modern era with the absolute secular state displacing the expansionist medieval church.
UNIVERSITY

Similar ambiguities in this historical process of differentiation are evident in the development of the university in our western world. The original universities, dating from around the tenth century, were “free” associations of scholars and students. They lived neither by the grace of the church nor by a grant from the state. Understandably, therefore, their continuing existence was often very precarious. But in principle they were “free” universities. In the medieval period, as society became highly ecclesiasticized, most universities fell under church control. The dogmas of the churchmen dictated the limits of academic pursuits. With the opening of the modern era the church lost its dominant hold on society. The growing power of absolute states often reduced the church to insignificance. Thus the university also came increasingly under the authority of the state, and the growing secular humanism of the state was imposed upon its institutions of higher education. Thus, whether through annexation by the church or by the state, the university lost its differentiated character, its own authority, freedom, and unique identity and integrity.

In view of these developments it was indeed a dramatic act of reformation when Kuyper and his followers in 1880 founded the Free Reformed University of Amsterdam. Kuyper appealed once again to the creational order. By divine ordinance, he held, the university has a right-of-existence and also reason-for-existence not dependent upon either the church or the state, but are anchored in God’s Word for an obedient societal order. In our century, in various places and in various ways, this principle has again suffered a severe eclipse.

The principle of inter-related differentiation is also relevant to the internal structures of academic institutions. The idea of sphere-sovereignty seeks to honour the place and task of each discipline within the curriculum. It lays to rest any notion of theology as “queen of the sciences”. For if Christ is King, we need no queens. It also puts an end to “empire building”, where a given science, momentarily riding high, tends to push others into a corner. It allows each discipline the prophetic liberty to engage in theoretical inquiry into its own specific aspect of created reality. It also honours a proper differentiation in scientific methods, encouraging each science to develop methods appropriate to its own unique window upon the world.

Likewise, the idea of sphere-universality tends to promote a community of
scholarship. For there is not only a rich diversity to the creational order, but also a deep-seated unity. The various disciplines are not, therefore, sealed compartments. There are bridges which bind the sciences together, making interdisciplinary scholarship possible, even mandatory. Such links within created reality open the door to, say, bio-chemistry and socio-psychology, pointing also toward unit studies and issue-oriented studies, involving clusters of disciplines, each contributing to a common project from its own unique point-of-view. In the creational order lies also the ultimate basis for faculty-wide seminars, workshops, study groups, and research institutes as fruitful ways to foster Christian scholarship.

Without blurring the boundary lines, these things need to be said in our over-developed western world. As a result of positivism, hyper-specialization is often a real threat. Scholars dig their academic holes, deeper and deeper, boring down over their heads, losing sight of other scholars with their digging projects, each hole getting narrower and narrower, and darker and darker inside. When differentiation of tasks and division of labours are not accompanied by a unifying vision of reality the end is fragmentation and polarization. The university then becomes a multiversity. A case in point is the theme of the next chapter — anthropology.
V A MODEL OF MAN

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

In recent times anthropology has moved onto centre stage in the curricula of many universities. Given the prominence of humanist philosophies of education, this is hardly surprising. This policy represents an ultimate consequence of a trend set in motion by the Enlightenment movement. Higher education has become increasingly man-centred.

This growing accent on anthropology has generated a plethora of clashing models of man. At a fundamental level of analysis they all offer answers to the deeply religious question posed by Psalm 8:4: “What is man...?” Who are we? What are we like? How are we to see ourselves? In addressing these questions I am reminded of a statement by Augustine: “I know what time is until I am asked to explain it”. Similarly, I know who I am until I am asked to give an account of it.

At a practical, common-sense level of knowing we all have an intuitive, immediate self-knowledge. In this primary, first-order way of knowing things the impinging power of God’s Word elicits from us a firsthand answer to the question of self-identity. At a theoretical level of analysis, however, the problems multiply. In this secondary way of knowing things we seek to account scientifically for the data of daily experience. Such critical reflection is a very complex business, aggravated by the fact that theoretical inquiry seems more open to intrusion by alien ideologies than pre-theoretical knowledge of self. There is always, moreover, a wonderful and mysterious depth-dimension to all created reality (Psalm 130:13-16) which baffles even the best of minds. It seems that this is especially so when it comes to self-reflection.

IDENTITY CRISIS

It is probably no overstatement to say that in this century human beings have run into a host of bewildering dilemmas in seeking to understand what being human means. In many ways we face an identity crisis. A motley array of models of man has emerged. Christian scholars too have contributed to this confusion — especially because many continue to cling in modern ways to ancient Hellenist views of man.
This confusion is compounded by the propagation of secularist, existentialist, nihilist, and neo-marxist anthropologies. Most recently process theology has created monist images of man. God gets collapsed into the historical process, leading to the dogma that the Ground of our own being is God Himself. God is no longer thought of in terms of the concept of height. He is relocated into the depths of human being. Scratch the surface of our life experience, and there is God.

One way to recapitulate western (Christian) history over the past millennium is to look at the shifts that have taken place in the prevailing views of the God-man relationship. Throughout the medieval and reformation eras the reality of God was strongly affirmed. If there were doubts, they were on man’s side. Under the influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment the tables were turned. Modern man placed exclamation marks behind man and question marks behind God. In our times question marks have arisen behind man as well as behind God. That leaves many of our contemporaries asking, Does anything make sense anymore? Out of this spiritual quagmire a puzzling array of contradictory models of man now forces itself upon our attention.

OVERVIEW
Without the “spectacles” (Calvin) of Scripture, scholars plunge themselves into a badly distorted field of vision — with predictable results for anthropology. With a few fast strokes let us paint a sketchy picture of some of the countless models of man in circulation today.

1. Classic nineteenth and twentieth-century liberals drew a utopian picture of human nature. Man’s destiny was projected onward into a sort of divine status. Given a little more time and a fair chance, the kingdom of heaven would be within our reach here upon earth. When that grand ship, the Titanic, which sank on its maiden voyage, was being christened at its launching, someone was overheard saying, “Even God — if there be a God — could not sink this vessel”. Scientific and cultural optimism knew no limits. Man is the measure of all things.

2. In more recent times these pipe-dreams have been shattered into a thousand irreparable pieces. In the aftermath of the holocaust and numerous other atrocities, in view of the mounting evidence of man’s
inhumanity to fellowmen, a drastically different verdict has emerged. Man is a ruthless beast, an uncontrollable demon, afflicted with an incurable sickness.

3. Some have speculated that our entire existence may be traceable to a bit of cosmic garbage left behind aeons ago by space travellers from some interstellar civilization.

4. In a crassly materialistic way the clue to human behaviour has been sought in our diets and eating habits. We are what we eat!

5. An evolutionary model of man has been elevated to unquestioned dogma in many circles. From very lowly beginnings, through a process of natural selection and adaptations, we have progressed through an infinite series of mutations to where we are today. And this evolutionary cycle has not yet run its full course.

6. According to Freud and his disciples, we are at bottom a bundle of subconscious drives and appetites. The key to human conduct and misconduct is in the deep-seated reservoirs of past experience, whose meaning can be unlocked by psychoanalysis.

7. In sharp contrast to Freudian contemporary behaviourists, following the lead of Skinner and others, view man as a bio-chemical organism interacting with his environment on a stimulus-response model. Accordingly, modification of behaviour is to be achieved by the use of drugs and a reconditioning of environmental factors.

8. The philosophical anthropology of Kantian thought has gained countless adherents. Hosts of people, including Christian scholars, preachers, and teachers uncritically accept the view that man is a rational-moral being. This is little else than an updated, secularized vision of the ancient nature-grace scheme. Human life is then suspended in the bipolar tension between a science ideal and a personality ideal – caught in the cruel dilemma between mechanical determinism and the counteracting impulse toward freedom.

9. To make this long list not too much longer, we are beset with a number of other reductionistic models of man:
   a) he is a political creature, a pawn of the state:
   b) he is an economic factor in the industrial process, a producer and a consumer;
   c) he is a prime moving force in the class struggle;
   d) and increasingly analogic, are drawn between human beings and
computers: input, controlled data processing, and output constitutes an adequate model by which to understand human life.

RECONSTRUCTION
Facing this ganglion of anthropological hypotheses, Christian scholarship is being challenged as perhaps never before to engage intensively in the reconstruction of a Biblical model of man. This is today a crucially important part of ongoing reformation. We must recognize that methodologically this poses some very intriguing problems. For we cannot really step outside ourselves to examine ourselves. As creatures we are bound to the horizon of our creaturely existence. We cannot mount up to some transcendent standpoint. We are confined to talking about ourselves from within ourselves. Yet, unique creatures that we are, it does seem possible to take some creaturely distance from ourselves. Real and meaningful self-reflection is possible.

Think of the psalmist, talking to himself. This is often taken as a sign of senility, but it can also indicate healthy self-examination. Listen to him as he engages in an inner dialogue: o my soul, why are you disquieted within me? What upsets and dismay you? Hope in God, for He will yet save you (Psalms 43:5).

We are here surrounded by the mystery that we are. In opening it up we find ourselves resorting to analogies, word pictures, similes, and metaphors. In this the Bible points the way. Given the light of Scripture, we are not left to our own devices. For in it we hear a Word from beyond ourselves — from Him who, as our Maker, has the prerogative of telling us who we are. Revelation then is the authoritative vantage-point we need to get our bearings upon what being human means.

What then do we discover as we peer through the Biblical window upon our life in the world? Not some mule, substantive, quantifiable description of ourselves. Rather, Scripture seems to say, if you wish to know who you are, look outside yourself. It views man relationally. It locates us within a network of relationships -- to God, to our fellowmen, to our inner selves, to the cosmos as a whole Its view of man is referential. Biblical revelation then goes on to offer a number of such confessional reference-points. These serve something like a set of guiding stars by which a ship at sea can chart a reliable course. Let us
now set our sights on four such confessional reference-points which form the Biblical context for self-understanding.

**RELIGION**

First, life is religion — life as a whole, life in its entirety. The way we live our lives, however that may be, that is our religion. It is the way we walk before the face of the Lord, whether obediently or disobediently, or, as typically, a mix of the two. Thus religion is more than a set of beliefs, more than church creeds, more than a standard of morals — though, of course, it does not exclude these. Religion is that ongoing series of responses to the Word of God, whether faithful or faithless, which embraces all our life relationships and activities.

Perhaps this Biblical truth can be illumined by recalling what has been called the “Augustinian rule”. As this great church father put it,

1. all men serve God or a god or some gods;
2. men are then transformed into the image of the God (god) (gods) they serve, and
3. men then proceed to shape a culture — social, economic, political, and educational institutions — in their own image.

The psalmist testifies to this deeply religious reality when he says, “They that serve (idols) become like them” (Psalm 115:8).

It is hard to quarrel with the argument that the god/idol of our modern western world is the “progress ideal”. This ideal is commonly measured in terms of economic affluence. Embedded in it is the not-so-hidden assumption that each succeeding generation must be materially better off than the previous generation. The results are observable in our societal structures. Go to any western metropolis. Climb up to some lookout tower which affords an overview of the heart of the city. Which are the tallest, most prominent, and imposing buildings? Until modern times it was almost invariably a cathedral tower. Now it is the banks, and trust companies, and other financial institutions. Church spires have been dwarfed by economic skyscrapers. That certainly says something, perhaps even speaks volumes, about a radical religious shift which has swept through the “Secular City”. For, as Christ said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). Or it has also been said that “our Babylonian culture is the product of our Babylonian hearts”. For religion is a matter of “the heart, out of which are all the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).
IMAGERS OF GOD
This all-embracing view of religion is rooted in the Biblical teaching concerning man as the image of God. The Bible wastes no time in identifying us: God made us in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-2) — a theme elaborated throughout Scripture. This is not some afterthought introduced as a footnote by an “absent-minded” Creator. In a general way all creation images its Maker’s will. In concentrated fashion, however, God’s image is embodied in man. He is the crown-creature. His place and task is integral to the whole creational order.

The acts of creation may be compared to building a house. Once this structured dwelling is in place, God, as it were, moves in the furniture and other furnishings, including plants and house pets. When everything is finally in a state of readiness — down to the last painting hanging on the wall — God ushers in mankind, male and female, as his tenants, housekeepers, and caretakers. Then the house becomes a home. God can then step back, as it were, and view his handiwork, and declare: “It is all very good ... I can see my image there.”

In Scripture this word picture, *imago Dei*, plays on the idea of a coin. Recall once again Jesus’ encounter with his critics when they try to ensnare Him in his words by asking, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?” In reply, Jesus takes a coin and asks, “Whose image is upon it?” Dropping the story at that juncture, the point here is that the image on the coin represents the presence of the ruler. Wherever the coin goes, there the ruler asserts his authority. So also with the imagery of man as image of God: We are to be God’s representative in the creation. God concretizes his presence by assigning us our posts.

Being human therefore means being responding, mirroring, echoing, imaging creatures. But not in some semi-divine sense. The idea of *imago Dei* may not be so construed as to abridge the Creator-creature distinction. Imaging God means at a creaturely level being all *we* were meant to be.

The image of God in man should, therefore, not be thought of as some on-tic quality in man which corresponds to a similar ontic quality in God. Much discussion concerning the so-called “seat” of God’s image in man has pushed us into that corner. Some then locate this “seat” in man’s rationality God is a Thinker, and we think his thoughts after Him — shades of the dogma of the primacy of the intellect. Such blurring of the otherness of God cannot
stand the light of day in Scripture (see Isaiah 55:8-9). Others locate the “seat” in man’s moral nature, or man as a speaking or acting creature all presumably finding their counterpart in God. Such efforts, one and all, entail a serious reduction of the Biblical idea of the image of God. For in reality it embraces the whole man, without the need of distinctions such as the image in a “narrower” and a “broader” sense.

The very procedure of seeking to identify the *imago Dei* by looking inside ourselves is very questionable. It must be viewed *ad extra*, not *ad intra*. We discover what imaging God means by looking, outside ourselves. It too, is a referential idea. It speaks of a living set of relationships. Imaging God means covenantal obedience, an affirmative response to his Word. It should therefore not be thought of in ontic categories, but as a religious relationship.

From this it is clear that the *imago Dei* should not be construed as a static entity which we share with God, but as dynamic interaction between covenantal partners. This theta leads us to avoid the idea of our being image-bearers, since this, like cross-bearing, tends to suggest the possibility of a choice -- whether to bear the image or not. Image-bearing carries with it a too external connotation, whereas being imagers of God is actually integral to our being human. Accordingly more vocational and functional concepts are preferable. Imaging God means fulfilling our callings, tasks, and offices in life.

Since we, humans, are images of God, we are commanded to make no other images of Him (Exodus 20:4-6). For God has the exclusive right to exercise this prerogative of establishing an image of Himself. That He has done in creating man. We must resist every temptation to “play God” by imaging Him in any other way than He has willed.

Within Scripture man as imager of God plays his role within the unfolding drama of creation, fall, redemption, and the coming consummation. Focussed on man, that full sweep of history can be recapitulated as follows. From our original state as imagers, through sin we become de-imagers, in Christ to be restored as re-imagers of God. Or, stated differently, we moved from *confortnitas* through *deformitas* to *reformitas*.

Along the way stands our fall into sin. The question then forces itself upon
us: What are its effects upon human life? The Heidelberg Catechism defines the image of God as “true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness” (Q/A 6). As a confession of the church this statement is probably adequate, as long as it is not seen in a restrictive sense. The present theoretical exploration, however, calls for a more expanded view, making explicit that the divine image involves the whole man. What then about the effects of sin upon it? The Heidelberger answers in terms of “the loss of the image of God”. How are we to understand this “loss”? As an optic loss, a loss in substance, a quantifiable loss, such as losing weight or losing one’s eyesight? As though Adam and Eve, suffering the fall, lost certain of their faculties? No, it was not such a measurable, substantial, structural, functional loss. It was rather a religious, directional, orientational loss. It is more like losing one’s way in a large and dense forest, without a compass. One then wanders around aimlessly, hopelessly lost. One is still all there, but has lost one’s bearings. Or it is like the sense of lostness many scholars and students feel in the current jungle of, say, psychological theories, without a clearing from which to get an overview and without the critical tools to sort out the issues.

To gain a fuller and clearer understanding of the effects of the fall upon us as imagers of God, perhaps a counterpart analogy is helpful. Redemption brings about a reversal of the de-imaging impact of our sinful condition. To highlight this point, recall Paul’s “Damascus Road” experience. What happened there was a radical and dramatic turning-point in his life. It did not, however, represent the regaining of a “lost” image. Rather, Paul was restored from a de-imaging (Phariseeism) to a re-imaging (Christian discipleship) way of life. It was not a change in faculties, but in their functioning; not an ontic, substantive, quantitative renewal, but a spiritual, religious change in the direction of his life calling.

In Paul’s life all things became new in the sense that the “old man” of sin made way for the “new man” of righteousness. But Paul was still the same “man”. There is thus continuity in humanitas, but a sweeping turn-around from deformitas to conformitas in the orientation of his life. If those scholars are right who say that Paul was a squatty, how-legged man, with poor eyesight, but a brilliant intellect, then these structural features and functions of his make-up continued to characterize him as a Christian
missionary. Yet, with all that, he turned a radically new corner in his life and moved out in a new direction.

Imaging God, our Maker and Redeemer, therefore means answering to our calling in his world. It means fulfilling our creaturely tasks, exercising “dominion.” in the creation (Genesis 1--2, Psalm 8), and, whether we eat or drink ai whatever we do, doing it all to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31).

Involved in being imagers of God are the following ideas.

1. We are to cease exchanging the truth for that lie which takes the form of worshiping or serving some creature in place of or alongside of the Creator (Romans 1:25). Sun, moon, and stars may not be elevated to objects of veneration, as in the ancient world; nor science, technology, race, or wealth — some of the idols of our modern society. For these are not gods, but creatures of God, his servants, subservient to the claims of his Word.

2. Nor need we live in cringing fear of creaturely powers. For these too arc under God’s command. “The sun-(god) shall not smite you by day, nor the moon-(god) by night” (Psalm 121:6). Moreover, Christ has conquered and now exercises authority over all the “principalities and powers” of this world (Ephesians 1:20-23, Philippians 2:9-10, Colossians 1:15-16).

1. Nor are we to rape and exploit the rich resources of creation. For the world is not ours to do with as we please. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof , the world and those who dwell therein ...” (Psalm 24:1). For imaging God means being his servants in the midst of his world, guardians of the well-being of our fellowmen, and stewardly administrators of the creatures great and small over whom we have been appointed as caretakers. After all, our neighbours around the world as well as the upcoming generation next door lay their rightful claim upon or earthkeeping obligation. As stewards, moreover, who will one day be called to render an account of our creational stewardship, what kind of earth do we intend to present to the Lord upon his return?

Christ, the last Adam, stands as the perfect and ultimate revelation of the redeemed and redeeming image of God. As the God-man He
exemplifies all the imaging God was ever meant to be (Colossians 1:15-16, Hebrews 1:1-3). In his life-renewing mission lies the re-imaging power which enables us to “put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:10). Reflecting the unique mediatorial image manifest in Christ, we can begin anew to experience how authority and service are conjoined like two sides of a single coin. In our Christian scholarship we then bring a serving mastery and a masterful service to bear upon our tasks within the various disciplines.

In Christian education, then, at every level, the teaching-learning process may be understood as “polishing the imago Dei in ourselves and in our students in order to bring out the shine”. When as teachers and students together we open up insight, into the meaning of life, developing a Biblically-directed critique on past tradition; and contemporary cultures, forming and informing the mind of Christ in us, then we are engaged academically in imaging God. This Scriptural teaching has everything to do with such down-to-earth things as lecturing, studying, researching, and writing.

**MAN IN OFFICE**

Occupying and exercising our various offices in life is another way of talking about imaging God. In our times the Biblical idea of office has been largely eclipsed or stripped of its fulness of meaning. In the measure that this happens we come out as loser. It is high time, therefore, for us to recover this lost ground, and to rehabilitate, rearticulate, and reactivate this soundly Biblical idea.

The concept “office” is nowhere to be found explicitly on the pages of Scripture. Yet the idea is implicitly resent everywhere. As, however, early Christianity evolved into medieval Christianity, the full-orbed Biblical meaning of office was gradually replaced by an elitist notion of officialdom. The body of Christ-believers as a whole was robbed of its sense of standing in office. The idea of office was recast in such a way as to apply only to authorities in church and state. Common Christians were disenfranchised. Office was reduced to arid reserved for the prince in the realm of nature and the priest in the realm of grace. Secular rulers sought then to shield themselves from just accountability by appealing to the
doctrine of “the divine right of kings”. Meanwhile, sacred leaders asserted their supreme authority by claiming that “both swords (temporal as well as eternal power) rest in a single hand” — that of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The Reformation ushered in a rediscovery of the Biblical idea of office. Luther, pioneer reformer, emphasises the universal priesthood of all believers. Calvin develops the idea of office more fully. He opens up the three-fold mediatorial office of Christ as the Biblical basis of exercising our prophetic-priestly-kingly office within the Christian community and society at large. Later, at the centre of the neo-reformational movement of the nineteenth/twentieth century, stands Kuyper. His work alerts us to the three-dimensional magnitude of the Biblical idea of office: As
a) servants of God, we are to be
b) custodians of our fellowmen (including our own inner lives) and
c) stewards of the cosmos.
This is the abiding and normative framework of reference for carrying on Christian scholarship, with its validity assured by the abiding creation-redemption ordinances of our Maker and Redeemer.

In thus taking a new look at an old idea, we must seek to do justice to the richly diversified aspects in which the deeply religious unity of the Biblical idea of office conies to expression. Just as the one Word of God reveals itself in a spectrum of divine Words addressed to our various life-relationships; just as there are many ways to walk that single Way which is Christ — so also with the Biblical teaching on love. Despite a lot of loose talk about it, love is never ethereal and abstract. When the Bible says, “God is love”, it fills this truth with down-to-earth meaningfulness by telling the story of what happened at Bethlehem, Golgotha, and Joseph’s garden.

Similarly, on the response side, when Scripture lays upon us the delightfully heavy claim of the central love-command, it points to concrete applications of it within the various spheres of our life activity. Love gets defined in real terms by the sphere in which it is exercised — in marital and familial relationships (fidelity), in neighbourly contacts (compassion), in political life (justice), and in the academic sphere (love qualified by student-teacher relationships). Love is relational.
The same holds true for the exercise of the universal office of all believers. Its universality is made concrete by the sphere of life-relationships in which it functions. We speak, therefore, of parental office, ecclesiastical office, governmental office, and so also of academic office — the office of Christian scholarship. This includes both teachers and students. At university level, across the years of undergraduate studies and on into post-graduate research, this involves increasingly a grow partnership venture, with teachers as senior partners and student, as junior partners.

In Christian scholarship. as in all other spheres, the idea of office embraces the following three fundamental aspects. First, whatever our field of studies, our calling is anchored in a delegated authority. It is not inherent, nor inherited, nor ultimately merited. We do not act in our own right. What Jesus said to Pilate holds for every office in life, academics included, “You would have no authority at all if it were not given from above” (John 19:10-11). Second, there is the matter of responsibility. We are answerable for the way we exercise our authority. To whom? Not first of all to department heads or administrators, nor to the scientific community or our constituency. Our primary responsibility is to the Giver of all authority. The third basic aspect of office is service. The authority vested in office is for responsible service. For Christian scholars this means service to students, colleagues, the Christian community, and society at large.

In all this the underlying Biblical meaning of office is that of stewardship (oikonomos) — literally, a person in charge of a household. It involves the ideas of overseeing, managing, administering the affairs for which we are responsible. A steward is a representative, a vicar, one who takes to heart the interests of another. As Christian scholars we are to represent the interests of our Lord in pursuing the academic aspects of the cultural mandate. Standing thus in office, we hold a position-in-between, a position-in-relationship. As instructors we stand under God and over our students. We are responsible to God and accountable for our scholarship, our research, our teaching.

This Biblical view of office carries with it a double advantage. First, it avoids two serious errors. On the one hand, it avoids tyrannizing tendencies, as in the vaunted supremacy of science. For every earthly office has only a limited authority. It is limited by the sovereign authority of God and his Word, and limited, furthermore, by the co-existing rightful claims of other authority
centres in life. On the other hand, this idea of office avoids egalitarian tendencies. The modern democratizing spirit tends to wipe out all rank and order in society — that between parents and children, between rulers and citizens, between teachers and students. Understood as position-in-between, the Biblical idea of office lends respect to authority based on insight, granting it the accompanying right to give leadership. Secondly, while affirming the fundamental equality of all men before the face of God, it therefore also honours the diversity of gifts, talents, and callings which God had distributed among his people.

**OUR MAKE-UP**

It seems that almost every consideration of anthropology sooner or later turns to the question: How are we constituted? Are we body and soul? Or body, soul, and spirit? Or what? Within the Judeo-Christian tradition the basic choice appears to lie between a dualist and a holist position. In our western world over the past 2000 years dichotomous theories of man have been dominant, with trichotomous theories emerging as more refined variations on the same theme.

Reflective of such bi-partite views of man is the myth narrated by Thomas Mann in his book, *Joseph the Provider*. In the beginning, so the legend goes, God created two distinct forms of creaturely existence – first spiritual beings, angels, and then material reality. And all was well. For each had its own distinct and separate mode of existence. But then, according to Mann, God decided to create a third kind of being in which the spiritual and the material were to be combined into a single being called man.

The angels looked on in disbelief. Dumfounded by this freakish plan, they expressed their vigorous disapproval. Such a hybrid mixture of soul and body just would not work. It is an unstable combination. But — so the drama unfolds — God always thinks He knows best. So man appeared upon the scene, partly body and partly soul. Before long, just as the angels had predicted, inevitable calamity struck. Man fell into sin. At this the angels turned to God with a “we told you so” attitude. But even then God refused to abandon this unworkable experiment. He set out to save this fallen monstrosity called a human being. This was too much for the angels to accept. So they rebelled.

This bit of legend is a melodramatic commentary on the kind of dualist
thinking which has plagued the western Christian tradition. Perhaps the most crucial era in its development was the second century. The fathers of this period generated a synthesis of Hellenist and Christian thinking. In Greek philosophy the spiritual was viewed as superior to the material -mind over matter. Accordingly bodily functions were regarded as being inferior to mental exercises. The body is the “prison-house” of the soul. Assimilated into Christian thinking, this resulted in assigning soul to a higher order of reality and body to a lower order. Accordingly the goal of Christian living was eventually defined as the beatific vision, a mystic union of the soul with God. Concomitantly the body was to be subdued by refusing food, the comforts of shelter, and the normal amenities of life, opting instead for celibacy, the monastery, and the hermitage.

Since medieval times such anthropological dualisms were often extended into paradigms for life in the Christian community. The clergy was viewed as the soul of the church, and the laity as the body. Analogous to this were certain views of society. The church deals with the spiritual concerns of the soul, the state with physical, bodily matters.

Such dichotomies continued to be uncritically accepted deep into the modern period. The twentieth century witnessed the raging conflict between liberalism and fundamentalism. Despite the diametrical opposition between them, at bottom both embraced the long-standing, deep-seated Greek dualism of body and soul. With this dichotomous assumption as a common point-of-departure, these hostile movements then moved out in sharply divergent directions. Liberalism focussed its attention on the betterment of physical conditions and the alleviation of bodily suffering (clearing slums, health care, education for advancement, eliminating sweat shops), Meanwhile fundamentalism tended to downplay such bodily concerns, concentrating instead on the salvation of souls. In short, a false dilemma emerged between social action and missions /evangelism as an outgrowth of this dubious anthropology.

The Reformed tradition too has not been immune to such un-Biblical views of man. Dualist anthropologies were canonized as accepted dogma especially through the influence of the Protestant scholastic theologies developed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In combatting a
resurgent medieval scholastic theology, post-Reformation thinkers chose to combat this force with its opponent's weapons — concepts and categories shaped by the Greco-Christian synthesis of earlier times. This method amounted to trying to pour Protestant wine into Roman Catholic wineskins.

Calvin himself had opened the door to these developments. His anthropology stands as the least reformed part of his theology. Indeed he departs from the medieval view of a partial fall, holding instead that the whole man is overturned by sin and accordingly that the whole man is redeemed by God's grace. Nevertheless, in his discussion of the inner makeup of the human constitution, his thinking betrays the tell-tale influence of Greek ideas of body and soul, even to the point of endorsing the notion of the body as "prison-house" of the soul.

In more refined forms such dualist views still live on among us. The well-known theologian, Louis Berkhof, defines man as being composed of two constitutive elements, one called body and the other called soul. With this as his definitional point-of-departure, he is the obliged to weigh seriously the ongoing quarrel between dichotomists and trichotomists.

Trichotomy, like dichotomy, is a typically Greek notion. It holds that body and spirit are so at odds with each other that a third mediating element is required, namely soul, to act as a kind of buffer-zone between these two warring factions. In evangelical circles this trichotomist position is reinforced in proof-textish style by an appeal to a certain Biblical passage (I Thessalonians 5:23) which speaks of body, soul, and spirit. In his discussion of this controversy Berkhof then assesses the arguments on both sides, and concludes in favour our of the more generally-held dichotomist view.

Calling upon Scripture to resolve such issues raises the hermeneutic question, What kind of Book is the Bible? To many it seems utterly natural in reading Scripture that whenever one encounters the word "soul" this means the higher, spiritual part of our way of being human, while "body" refers to the lower part. And indeed one can make a certain sense out of such a reading. But is it the only way to understand the Biblical view of man? And is it the best? It never occurs to many to ask whether this is actually what the text says, or whether
perhaps it is because we have been outfitted with bifocal glasses. For bi-focal glasses are bound to leave dualist impressions. After all has been said and done, it seems quite likely that such impressions reside in the eve of the beholder, not in the text. What if one were to don uni-focal glasses? The Scriptures are certainly open to such a reading too. And what if we were to conclude that such uni-focal glasses comport better with the Biblical message, that they are indeed ground and polished by Scripture itself? Such a holist view of man appears in fact to do greater justice to the light of Scripture as it falls upon the data of our daily experience. Current studies in the human sciences have captured something of this insight in speaking of man as a psycho-somatic unity.

The dogmatic studies of G.C. Berkouwer around the middle of this century point clearly in this same direction — especially his book, Man — The Image of God, chapter six on “The Whole Man”. Berkouwer breaks decisively with the older dualist anthropologies and breaks through toward a more consistently holist view. No part /part analysis of human nature answers to a Scripturally-illumined reflection upon our life in God’s world. In thus breaking new ground Berkouwer lays to rest as falsely stated problems the time-worn debate concerning creationism and traducianism on the origin of the soul, the Hellenistically laden notion of the immortality of the soul, and “escapist” ideas which depict the soul taking its flight into glory while the body ends up paying the full “wages of sin” in death. According to Berkouwer, Scripture speaks consistently of man in a religiously whole way.

What Berkouwer has done theologically has been worked out in a more penetrating anthropological analysis within the philosophical tradition of Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. Their foundational work in Christian philosophy develops more fully and incisively the two basic dimensions of a Biblically-directed anthropology, namely, the spiritual wholeness of man rooted in the deeply religious unifying centre of our life, the heart, and integrally related to this the richly coherent diversity of our various bodily functions. Such a model of man represents an advance in articulating a holist anthropology.

On this view, the “heart” represents the religious concentration point of our entire selfhood — the mini-me. Over 800 Biblical references point in this direction. Out of the “heart”, then, are all the soul/body issues of life (Proverbs
4:23). “Soul”, accordingly, is one Biblical way of talking about the whole person. It points to the “inner man”. It refers to the whole man looked at from the inside out. So also, “body” is another Biblical way of talking about the whole person. It points to the outer life of man. It is the whole man looked at from the outside in. Accordingly it embodies all our historical ways of functioning — eating, sleeping, working, playing, walking, talking, and all the rest. Thus it can be said that spiritually the whole inner man comes to bodily expression in the activities of the whole outer man.

Such a holist view of man is confirmed by our daily experience. When we suffer headaches, a bodily pain, we become spiritually depressed. Conversely, when overcome with homesickness, a spiritual affliction, we often suffer severe bodily repercussions. We never experience anything in either a purely spiritual or a purely bodily way. It is always the whole person, bodily/spiritually, who is involved in every experience.

Reading a passage such as Romans 12:1-2 with such uni-focal glasses avoids the distortions that come with a bi-focal reading. Paul speaks there of the “transforming of our minds” (soul, spirit) and the offering of our bodies as “a living sacrifice”. His words should not be read to say that the soul-part of us must be transformed and the body-part of us offered. The better reading is this: By the inner transformation of the whole man all the bodily acts of the whole man must be dedicated to the service of the Lord. Such a holist view does greater justice to the way Scripture sheds its light upon our daily lives.

What then shall we say about that event which takes place at seventy or eighty or ninety years of age which we call “death”? On a dualist view one is led to say that the body-part of man dies and is buried, while the soul-part lives on to be with the Lord. This view is burdened with a host of problems and great anomalies. The holist view opens up different, though not less mysterious perspectives. When Jesus says that “though (a man) die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25), He should not be understood to say that we partly die and partly live. A better interpretation would be this: Though a man dies bodily, yet shall he live spiritually. Bodily speaking, the whole man dies. All his bodily, historical functions cease. He no longer breathes or feels or laughs or cries. At the same time, spiritually the whole man continues to he alive and well with the Lord.
Approached uncritically, the dualist view of man feels as easy and natural as an old pair of shoes. One can, moreover, put it into a neat mathematical formula: one-half plus one-half equal a Whole. It seems so rational. The holist view, on the other hand, has mysterious depths and dimensions to it which overtax our rational powers. One whole plus one whole equals one whole! Yet, in the light of Scripture, this holist view can stand up under the impinging power of God’s Word for creaturely life better than its alternative. Is it perhaps so that the truer position is seldom the easier to grasp?

The holist view offers normatively satisfying guidelines for our present life in God’s world. At death, however, we encounter baffling mysteries. Yet perhaps it should not surprise us that we are hard pressed to draw normative conclusions from such an anti-normative state of affairs as death.

Nevertheless, by faith the bottom line is this: “Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7-9) — “we,” that is, we in the wholeness of our entire being — bodily/spiritually.
VI BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

The focus of this little book is scholarship. It is orientational in its thrust — getting our bearings and setting our sights. Its aim is Christian scholarship. The theoretical reflections it offers are therefore set within the perspectives of a Biblical world-view. For a Christian way of engaging in scholarly work is unthinkable apart from a Scripturally-directed life-vision. Pulling together the components highlighted here, we arrive at the subtitle of this booklet: Biblical Perspectives on Christian Scholarship.

This choice for a Biblical perspective rests upon a certain understanding of the kind of Book the Bible is. It calls for a clarification of the basic principles of Biblical interpretation — the methods and rules which govern our understanding of the way Scripture addresses fundamental issues in Christian scholarship. That brings us then to the question of Biblical hermeneutics.

SURVEYING THE FIELD

The origins of the concept “hermeneutics” are largely clothed in uncertainty. The best educated guess traces it back to the Greek god “Hermes” — the messenger god in charge of communicating and interpreting messages. We find an allusion to this designation in Acts 14:12. Overwhelmed by a miracle of healing, the people of Lystra are on the verge of offering sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, thinking they are gods come down to earth. Barnabas they view as Zeus, and Paul as Hermes, since apparently he was the chief spokesman.

Hermeneutics holds, of course, not only for Biblical interpretation. It applies in other areas of literary interpretation as well. Wherever people are involved in the interpretation of written documents a certain hermeneutic is operative. This is true, for example, in analysing Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration on Human Rights”, Handel’s “Messiah”, or Einstein’s theory of relativity. Each genre of literature calls for its own kind of hermeneutic key to unlock its meaning. In each case the manuscript’s message plays a decisive role in shaping its appropriate method of interpretation.

This is also true of the Bible. It is a unique Book. It stands in a class by itself. There are, of course, certain literary features of Scripture which bear a
structural similarity to other kinds of writings. For it is fully and truly historical, couched in the words of men like Isaiah and Paul. But it is more than that. It is also trans-historical. In and through its Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek forms it is also fully and truly divine. The Bible addresses us as the Word of God in the words of men. This makes it a unique Book. The uniqueness of its message calls for a unique method of interpretation, a unique hermeneutic.

It must be recognized, furthermore, that hermeneutics involves not only the particular literary work in hand, but also what the reader /interpreter brings to it. It is always we as persons who are involved in the interpretation of the Bible. On the response side, therefore, the faith commitment, the religious perspective, the world-view, and the theoretical presuppositions of the interpreter also play a significant role. The claim to objectivity is a myth. Confessional neutrality is impossible. In approaching Scripture, the best objectivity is an honest-to-God’s-Word subjectivity.

In Biblical hermeneutics, then, we are concerned with the presuppositions, principles, and methods of interpreting Scripture. It is that science which seeks to give a theoretical account of what is going on as we exegetize the Bible, a theoretical account of the process of interpreting the Scriptures. Normally we experience a movement toward increasing intensity and more penetrating in-depth analysis in our understanding of Scripture as we move along from a basic plain and practical reading of the Bible, through the stages of a more disciplined exegesis and interpretation of it, to that theoretical reflection upon it called hermeneutics.

**HISTORICAL ORIENTATION**

These various levels of concern with Scripture are evident throughout the 2000-year history of western Christian thought. Always the attention of the Christian community was riveted upon the Biblical message, its meaning, and how to open it up. Clearly, however, this ceaseless activity never yielded unified or infallible results. Looking back it is not difficult to detect serious flaws in the way our forebears handled the Bible. In the early church already, under the influence of the Greek mind, many of the fathers, including Augustine, thrived on the very dubious allegorical method. Its operative principle assumes that beneath the literal message of the Biblical text there lies a deeper spiritual meaning which only the discerning eye can uncover. Thus Rahab’s “scarlet cord” hanging from
her Jericho window is not merely a sign of her trade, her will to survive, her assistance to the spies, and her commitment to the cause of Israel; most profoundly it is a sign of the blood that flowed at Calvary's cross. So also with the two coins given by the good Samaritan to the inn-keeper to care for the victimized traveller: these two coins represent the two means of grace, the Word and the sacraments. Such ancient, and very intriguing, yet misguided methods of Biblical interpretation lived on long in the history of the church. In our times too many Bible interpreters still rely on allegorical methods. Generally, however, our modern era has witnessed a shift to some form of the historico-critical method.

But let us turn now to the Reformed tradition. It is true, of course, that those standing within this stream of western Christianity have not been immune to larger hermeneutic developments. Yet the Calvinist wing of the sixteenth century Reformation has also made some distinct contributions. Let us begin with our “patron saint”, John Calvin. As a second generation reformer he shared with the pioneer reformer, Martin Luther, the newly recovered reformational accent on *sola Scriptura*. In adopting this password Calvin, like Luther, took a stand against the medieval dogma which canonized official church tradition as a second source of revelation. By Scripture alone even church traditions must be tested. Scripture is the hermeneutic key.

A basic thought running through Calvin’s writings is this: Beware of saying more than Scripture says, for this is speculation. Beware also of saying less than Scripture says, for this is to impoverish God’s Word. This Biblical perspective sets the parameters for Christian scholarly reflection. Recall, for example, the oil lamps used by an earlier generation. In gaining an optimum of light, the right wick setting was crucial. If, dissatisfied with the optimum glow, one turned the wick down lower or up higher, the result was not more light, but more smoke. So also we must honour Scripture’s prerogative to delineate the bounds of our theoretical-scientific inquiries.

This hermeneutic principle, *sola Scriptura*, finds its complement in the related principle, *toto Scriptura*. We must seek to honour the fulness of Biblical revelation in its unity and diversity. To counteract the universal effects of the fall, the light of Scripture, as redemptive revelation, reaches out universally to dispel the darkness of sin. Biblical revelation is co-extensive with God’s
revelation in creation. There are, therefore, no alien terrains for Christian scholarship. Biblical perspectives are as relevant for biology, psychology, sociology, and economics as for ethics and theology. Humbly submitting to the “analogy of Scripture” — that is, observing the rule of contextual interpretation, comparing Scripture with Scripture — we find the light of Scripture falling upon our pathway in all the various fields of learning.

Since Calvin, many heirs of this reformational tradition have departed from these insights. Fortunately others have also built upon the hermeneutic foundations he laid. There have therefore been some significant advances upon the good work begun by Calvin. This developing heritage has come down to us mainly through the neo-Calvinist revivals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emerging from the Reveil, the Afscheiding, and the Doleantie. The fruits of these labours are readily available to us, ripe for harvesting. The ideas developed in this booklet represent an attempt to take advantage of the best in that tradition of Reformed hermeneutics.

RADICALIZING THE ISSUE
Within the purview of this 500 year span in reformational thought, the most disruptive force to appear upon the scene was the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century. More than any other factor it served to short-circuit a healthy Biblical hermeneutic. The “En-light-enment” was heralded pretentiously as the second great “Light” to be turned on in our world, outshining that “Light of the World” which appeared at the crossroads of history, at the centre of the centuries 2000 years ago. With it came a radical and sweeping shift from God-centred to man-centred living and learning. The focus in scholarship was shifted forcibly from being to knowing, from ontology to epistemology, from created reality to noetic process. An obsessive concern arose with the knower reflecting critically upon his own knowing activity. Out of these revolutionary upheavals was born our contemporary fixation upon the problem of hermeneutics.

Roughly speaking, one can say that the history of theoretical reflection in western Christianity falls into three major historical stages. The energies of the ancient church were devoted largely to questions of theology. This came to dramatic expression in the trinitarian and Christological controversies. The basic question was: What think ye of the Christ — whose Son is He? During the medieval and reformational eras the attention of the Christian community was
focussed quite centrally on questions of *soteriology*. How can a man get right with God? The way of salvation occupied centre stage. Now during the modern period it is questions of *epistemology* which have come to the fore with a vengeance. Sooner or later, in every discussion of fundamental issues, someone is hound to throw out the challenge: Show me your hermeneutic. The modern mind is preoccupied with the questions: Can we really know at all? What can we know? How can we know? Understandably, therefore, as never before the matter of Biblical hermeneutics has come to play a dominant role in Christian scholarship.

A generation or so ago Biblical hermeneutics was limited pretty much to a consideration of the specific rules and techniques which apply to interpreting the Scriptures. A fairly standard approach was the so-called “historico-grammatico-theological method”. This method did indeed involve a measure of due regard for larger perspectival issues, such as the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture, the unity of Old and New Testaments, and exegetizing a text within its concentrically expanding contexts. Yet often these larger perspectival issues were brought to bear upon a passage in rather haphazard ways. In recent decades, however, the scope of hermeneutic studies has been deepened and widened to refer primarily to the interpretive process as an expression of world-views and life-visions. This is reflected in the strong current emphasis upon such motifs as “Sein” and “Dasein”, authorial intent, and “the fusion of horizons” — that of the ancient writer and that of the contemporary interpreter. Thus hermeneutics has come to mean a “theory of theories”.

**A VOCATIONAL MODEL**

If then hermeneutics is such a highly theoretical activity, the question arises whether it is of any real importance for the life of the believing community. Does it have any practical value for daily Christian living? Let me suggest an affirmative answer. To understand the place and task of hermeneutics, and to implement it, calls for a principled and structured view of how the various institutions which make up the Christian community function. By way of illustration, note the following “vocational model” of the interrelatedness of the academy, the church, and the home. The *academy* serves as the centre for theoretical reflection on how to interpret the Bible. The *church* provides a pulpit for communicating in a lively, liveable, and meaningful way the best of such Biblical insights for the building up of God’s people gathered in worship. While the minister in his study may benefit from his hermeneutic studies in the
academy, once he mounts the pulpit he must translate these lecture ideas into sermon themes. In the home setting, say, in family devotions, the father can then draw upon the church’s proclamation of the gospel as he leads his family in reading the Bible and commenting upon it in down-to-earth ways. Thus the academy can serve the church, so that the church in turn can serve the family. Accordingly the professor can serve the minister, so that the minister in turn can serve the family members. So also Biblical hermeneutics stands in the service of proclamation, and proclamation in the service of the practical faith-life of all God’s people. In our various vocations, therefore, in serving God’s Word we become servants of all God’s servants in the pew and on the street.

Hermeneutics is obviously not a panacea for all our problems. Yet a consistent hermeneutic would clearly go a long way toward creating greater unity among Christians. For more often than we care to admit, our good confessions on how to interpret Scripture are betrayed by our actual conduct in doing so. The hermeneutic roads we travel are lined with numerous pitfalls, and again and again we find ourselves slipping into them. One of our most persistent besetting sins as teachers, preachers, and other interpreters of Scripture is that of moralism.

MORALISM
The problem of moralism was not born with this generation. We have been wrestling with it in our Reformed tradition for centuries, sometimes consciously, sometimes more intuitively. To understand the seductive power of moralism as we face it today, we must go back for a moment to the age of the Reformation. Basically the Reformers broke with the moralist tradition of the medieval society. But this breakthrough proved to be short-lived. By the seventeenth century, and throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a Protestantized version of moralism was smuggled back into those very communities where the Reformation had struck deep roots. In view of these developments, it is not surprising that the influence of moralism has repeatedly invaded our Reformed communities. It is a persistent problem, older even than the spiritual struggles of the Reformation age. Recall the sharp clashes between Christ and the Pharisees and between the apostles and the Judaizers in the New Testament. Already in these conflicts of the first century moralism was at stake. In the centuries which followed many of the early church fathers shaped a moralist tradition which has plagued the Christian community down
through the centuries to our own time.

Well, what is so bad about moralism? It is not easy to come up with a short and simple answer to that question. Everyone has difficulty defining moralism with great precision. This is true, I think, in part at least, because moralist patterns of thought and action have insinuated themselves so deeply into the fabric of our lives that their very presence often escapes our attention. Moralism has become so much a part of our very way of life that we can hardly take enough distance from it to take an honest look at it. It hangs heavy in the very air we breathe. Some of us have literally grown up on it. Getting rid of it is no easy matter. We must learn to smell it out, and get a feel for its distortions of the Biblical message, and then overcome this deformation of Biblical Christianity by the reformational power of a better understanding of the Scriptures.

But don’t underestimate the cost in terms of hard work. Time is needed to unlearn some old ways and relearn some new ones. For moralism has something enticing about it. It is one of the easiest ways of interpreting the Bible. It offers a lot of short-cuts to quick and easy exegesis, with almost instant results. Any teacher or preacher who runs short on time and must engage in hasty preparation will almost inevitably fall into the moralist trap.

It offers handy recipes for ready-made applications of Biblical truth to all kinds of life situations. It takes the delightfully hard work out of Bible teaching. Many draw the conclusion that, if moralism is not the road to travel, the Bible becomes an unteachable and unpreachable book. If we cannot attach moral lessons to the Bible story, how can we make it meaningful and up-to-date and relevant?

We must be clear on this: The question is not whether the Bible is applicable. It is. The question is this: How to teach and preach the Bible? On what Biblical assumptions do we proceed? Not on the assumption that the Bible is an ancient book on sacred history, which awaits our ingenuity in making it come alive for today by moralizing upon it. Rather, our faith-commitment and working assumption must be this, that the Bible as Word of God is always up-to-date, relevant, and meaningful. For it is the Good News of the mighty saving acts of God in Jesus Christ by which He claims our life in every part — as servants of God, as guardians of our own inner lives, as neighbours to our
fellowmen, as stewards of the manifold riches of God’s creation. This, in short, is the message of the Bible. Our method of teaching the Bible must seek to do justice to this message.

MORE THAN MORALITY
Moralism represents a radical failure to uphold the full gospel for the whole of Christian living. Take a look at the word itself — moralism. Note the ending, that suffix “ism”. Whenever we meet a word ending in “ism”, we should run up a little red flag. “Ism” spells trouble. An “ism” is almost always wrong, whether that be humanism or secularism or individualism or activism or scientism. An “ism” means that a part of the truth is taken for the whole truth, that something partial is made total, that something relative is made absolute.

This description holds for moralism too. It takes a part of the truth for the whole. It reduces the fulness of God’s Word to moral precepts. It takes the full religious response of the heart and reduces it to the observance of moral codes. Religion then becomes morality. In this respect moralism fits the pattern of much of modern nineteenth and twentieth century thinking, which replaces theology with ethics. The results of this trend are clear: One seldom hears about religious judgments or religious values. Instead we hear all kinds of talk about moral values, moral judgments, moral laws, about the morality of war, about living in a moral universe. Surely there is more to life than morality. Life is religion. And Biblical religion is deeper and fuller than morality. Indeed, there is a moral aspect to revelation. But there is more to revelation than morals. And certainly our response to revelation includes moral considerations. But morality does not exhaust our response to God’s Word. Moral concern does indeed play a dominant role in certain man-to-man relationships. But moralism, in absolutizing moral concern, while reducing religion to ethics, contributes to the horizontalizing of the Christian religion.

Moralism is not confined to certain churches or schools of thought. It is a diffusive tendency, present in many Christian communities. And it is highly contagious. We are all open to its infectious influence.
BY WAY OF EXAMPLE

In the light of this historical orientation and preliminary analysis, let us now turn to the Bible and see what happens to the Scriptures when the moralist takes over. In panoramic fashion I shall cite some examples of moralist interpretation. They are not fictitious or contrived. All of these exposés of moralism could be duly documented.

Let’s start with the Joseph stories. Here most of us could speak from personal experience. In telling Bible stories to children, the life of Joseph invariably gets high priority, along with Samuel and David and Daniel. I suspect that our moralist inclinations help to account for Joseph ranking so high on the list. For what is the central point which so often gets driven home? That here in Joseph we have a good, clean-cut, upright, chaste young man, who endured the evil circumstances which befell him as an innocent victim (with hardly a whisper about his being a “spoiled brat”), who stood up valiantly to the seductions of Potiphar’s wife, and who because of his moral fortitude was rewarded with a position of great honour in Egypt. A truly remarkable rags to riches story. And the moral of the story is obvious: If we, like Joseph, live pure and innocent lives, God will also crown our lives with success.

Yet, for us who know the Bible, that gnawing sense of uneasiness just will not go away: Is that all there is to the Joseph stories? Is it simply the intent and purpose of Scripture to present us with Joseph as a model of morality for us to emulate? That is indeed all the moralist can make of these stories. The Bible itself, however, speaks a different language. It presents Joseph as the provider, God’s servant in securing a haven of refuge for his people. Under God, Joseph is the saviour of the children of Israel. This is the note that Joseph himself strikes in recounting the dramatic events of his life. He confesses that God was active in it all, overruling the ups and downs of his chequered career, bending evil intentions unto good ends, for the saving alive of many people on the way to the fulfilment of the Messianic promises made to his fathers. You see, such a Biblical perspective puts the Joseph stories in the fuller and richer context of the unfolding plan of salvation.

Now look what the moralist does with Joseph’s prison companion, the butler. After the butler was restored to his office, in fulfilment of Joseph’s prophecy, Scripture tells us that the butler forgot about Joseph. What a terrible
forgettery! What base ingratitude! Out of sight, out of mind. Now learn this negative lesson from the thankless butler: Be careful not to forget favours! People of God, don’t be like that butler! And if one then asks what all this has to do with that passing reference from the Book of Genesis, one gets only a cold stare. After all, it was such a nice meditation!

Turn over a few pages in the Bible to Jacob’s prophecy concerning his twelve sons in Genesis 49. The sermon centres on Jacob’s lion-hearted son, Judah. The theme is “The Value of Virtue”. The speaker explains that Judah rose to a position of prominence among his brethren because of the nobility of his character. But what about Judah’s sordid act of adultery in Genesis 38? The moralist usually suffers from such serious blind-spots. In dealing with Scripture he is sure to scan God’s work in vain. For Judah’s significance in Scripture is bound up inseparably with the Tribe of Judah, of which he was the father. Out of Judah comes David and that whole, long line of Messianic promises which, surprisingly, in the fulness of the times, gave birth to the great Son of David, from the Tribe of Judah, our Lord Jesus Christ. One cannot deal biblically with Judah apart from the promised sceptre of Genesis 49, which would not depart from Judah’s children’s children until He should come to whom the sceptre belongs, who would in the fulness of the times claim the obedience of all the people.

Come, listen to the moralist expound on Elijah, sitting despondently under his juniper tree. God rouses him from his slumbers with these words, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too long for thee”. What else can this mean, here and now, on this Communion Sunday, than that we too must arise and eat the broken bread and drink the poured wine, for the journey from now until the next Lord’s Supper is too hard and long for us. And such moralisms often win stunning claims: “That man sure knows how to get a lot out of the text!”

Moralism always has trouble with salvation history. Nevertheless, its exegetical ingenuity usually finds in it a lesson-for-today, even in the military history of the kings of Israel and Judah. When Judah appeals to Syria for assistance in fighting Israel, this finds its parallel in World War II, when the United States called upon Russia to help subdue Germany. No problem here in separating the good guys from the bad guys.
Proceeding through Scripture in this fashion, such straight-line, ready-made moral lessons are almost everywhere present, like ripened fruit, waiting to be plucked.

Solomon was wise — so we too must be wise — overlooking Solomon’s spiritual folly, which precipitated the division of the kingdom at his death.

Daniel was brave in facing that den full of lions. So we too must bravely challenge the dens of iniquity all around us — overlooking the heart of the matter, namely, that Daniel was a servant of the Lord in calling the bluff of the false religions of Babylon.

David was courageous in facing that pagan giant, Goliath. So we too must show courage in fighting the Goliaths of our time — as though David was merely settling a personal feud with Goliath, rather than fighting the battle of the Lord against this scoffer, who was defying God and mocking his people.

Job was patient. So we too must be patient in hearing the trials of life — overlooking Job’s agonizing impatience in crying out for the coming Mediator who would finally settle accounts between him and God.

Abraham showed a magnanimous spirit, for the land developer that he was, in allowing his junior partner, his nephew Lot, to have first-choice in dividing the land. So we too must be generous in allowing others to have first-choice and walk off with the lion’s share, while we settle for second-best — all of which overlooks completely God’s hand in this real estate transaction, using even Lot’s greediness in fulfilling his promise to make Abraham the sole inheritor of the promised land.

Perhaps you have noticed that these moral paradigms were picked at random, presented in a rather haphazard order. That was done quite deliberately. For to the moralist time and place and unique role in the history of redemption are of little importance.

MORE OF THE SAME
Moving on now to the New Testament, the same pattern emerges.
Judas betrayed the Master. Don’t be like Judas — as though this traitorous act had nothing to do with Old Testament prophecy.

Peter denied his Lord. Be careful not to follow his bad example. And if you should slip once, stop before taking that second and third step. Such moralizing reduces the gospel narratives to “do’s” and “don’ts”, apparently oblivious to the truth that Jesus Christ is always the central Player in the drama of redemption.

Moralists have had a hey-day with that parable popularly called “The Prodigal Son”. Somehow they simply by-pass the opening verses of Luke 15, which indicate that all three parables of our Lord in this chapter are really a strong polemic precisely against moralism. Instead, moralists would have us learn from the younger son the very difficult virtue of apologizing for our mistakes, of being willing to say “I’m sorry”. From the older brother another lesson must be taken to heart, namely, to avoid selfishness and pride. And from the forgiving father offended parents must gain the moral strength to be ready always to welcome home their straying children. To which the moralist adds his final punch-line: Isn’t it marvellous how the Bible bridges the generation gap!

Again, we read in the gospels that Jesus instructed his disciples to fetch a colt from yonder town, “for the Master has need of him”. This episode presumably teaches the moral truth, that colts, as well as full-grown donkeys, that is, youth as well as adults, have a place in Jesus’ plan. Who would ever have thought of that! It took the ingenious scholarship of the moralist to uncover this profound truth.

In a series of sermons on the twelve apostles, the preacher finally got to James-the-Less. The Bible, you recall, has very little to say about this rather obscure apostle — so the sermon began. But lest you be led to think that this service will be unduly brief, rest assured that something sizeable will indeed come out of the text. For, you see, James-the-Less stands in Scripture as a living example of this moral truth, that God can use little people too. Your imagination can fill in the rest. But really, what significance does the Bible attach to James-the-Less apart from his being an apostle, an eye-and-ear-witness of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as such, a living link between Christ and his church?
CRITIQUE
Moralism has no built-in restraints against such manhandling of the Bible, which goes to such stupid and ridiculous lengths just to score a point. You just cannot treat the Bible like that with impunity! Or is it merely empty talk, when the Scriptures admonish us to “handle aright the Word of truth”? The moralist, despite his orthodox-sounding confessions about the inspiration and authority of the Bible, operates with a hermeneutic which distorts the Biblical message. Whatever his principles, he works with a low view of the Word of God. For him the Bible is a Book-of-the-past. He accordingly sees it as his calling to make it come alive today. He is therefore compelled to resort to clever devices. Saddled with a false sense of relevancy, he sets out to help the Bible along in order to make it applicable today.

Moralists, it must be conceded, often say some rather beautiful, even edifying things. But, more often than not, such moralisms have next to nothing to do with the text at hand. When it comes to the meaning of the Scriptures, moralism misses the mark, sometimes by a little, sometimes by a mile. I like to think of moralism as a Christian heresy. It is heresy, not apostasy: It is un-Biblical, though perhaps not always anti-Biblical. It works with the truth, but in a distorted way. It is a Christian heresy in the sense that it could arise only out of a Christian tradition. It draws upon the Christian heritage, even while departing from it. It loses sight of the heart of the gospel, the saving Work of God in Jesus Christ throughout the history of redemption. Moralism majors in minors, as it stresses the so-called moral precepts of the Bible at the expense of the central law of love. While exploiting the many stories in the Bible, it has no eye for that one unifying Story which binds the many stories together, giving them a Christ-centred focus. It fails to see the woods for all the trees.

Moralism almost always goes hand-in-hand with scholasticism, that is, with a view of Scripture which reduces it to a handbook of doctrines to be intellectually mastered, thus leaving us with a Bible which is little more than a dead and dull dogmatic textbook. Then, by way of compensation, to salvage some semblance of life out of this deadening dogmatism, the scholastic resorts to moral lessons to rescue a bad situation. But the consequences of this dogmatic-moralist hermeneutic are clear: We are left with a dualist, two-level approach to Scripture — exposition plus application.
Master the doctrines and then append some moral lessons. Learn the Biblical facts and then add to them some moral values. Such dichotomies destroy the unity of Biblical revelation, as well as the unity of our wholehearted response to God’s Word.

MARKS OF MORALISM
Let us now put this rather rambling critique into clearer focus by offering a point-by-point analysis of moralism under the sub-heading, “the marks of moralism”. As I see it, the objections to moralism can be summarized in six main points.

In the first place, as mentioned earlier, moralism is reductionist. As Marxism reduces history to economic categories, and as behaviorism reduces life to biochemical functions, so moralism reduces revelation to moral precepts, and reduces our religious response to moral sensitivity and conduct. All life-relationships are then viewed as moral relationships, to be judged by moral standards. Then, in the case of Jonathan’s covenant with David, for example, the moral virtues of loyalty and valour are extolled, overlooking Jonathan’s heart-commitment to the promises of God as embodied in David.

Secondly, moralism deals with the Bible in a fragmentary way. One of its trademarks is interpreting passages, and verses, and even snatches of Scripture in isolation from the total context and overall historico-redemptive perspective of the Bible. To the moralist the historical and cultural setting is really unimportant, for he is concerned with timeless moral truths. He lacks a comprehensive view of the Biblical message. He can therefore expound on young Samuel’s response to God’s Word, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”, without paying much attention to the spirit of those times, which Scripture describes in these words, “But the Word of the Lord was scarce in those days”.

Thirdly, moralism interprets the Bible in a highly individualist way. It shows very little appreciation for the communal character of God’s revelation: “Hear, o Israel, the Lord your God is one God, and you shall worship Him with all your heart and soul and mind and strength”. Nor does it have an eye for the corporate personality of God’s people in their confessional response to God’s Word: “Nay, but we will walk in Thy ways”, nor for the unity of the body of Christ in the New Testament and today. In its heavy emphasis on character studies and Biblical biographies, moralism lifts people out of their covenantal
communities in order to look at them individually as isolated personalities. In keeping with this, countless Bible lessons have been published on the heroes of faith or un-faith, holding them up as examples for our emulation or non-emulation. The singular stands out in the moralist’s vocabulary, “me” and “thee”, “Jesus and I”, with very little room for the plural, “all one body we”, “Jesus and his church”. It stresses the branches, not the vine; the individual members, not the body; the single straying sheep, not the flock.

Fourthly, moralism, despite all its talk about God, promotes a man-centred interpretation of Scripture and a man-centred religion. In opening the Scriptures it is not the mighty saving acts of God which stand in the foreground, but the obedient and disobedient responses of God’s people. Moralism then holds up these responses as the norms for our lives. Human conduct, not God’s Word becomes the norm for Christian faith and life.

Thus moralism comes dangerously close to a kind of Christianized humanism. The moralist may still confess salvation by grace and justification by faith. But in practice his hermeneutic fosters the spirit of works-righteousness. With its heavy emphasis on spiritual introspection, moralism teaches people to take themselves too seriously. It drives Christians to a gnawing sense of uncertainty: “How am I doing?” As though the Scriptures are primarily about all kinds of people, rather than about God’s sure Word of promise in Jesus Christ.

Fifthly, moralism breeds legalism. It creates the spectre of a new kind of Phariseeism. With its emphasis upon Scripture as a code-book of moral conduct, there arises the real threat of a behaviorist Christianity, with law upon law, precept upon precept. The moralist thinks, rather confidently, that he can find in his Biblical arsenal all the moral-rearmament weapons he needs to combat the so-called “New Morality” and to reinforce the so-called “Old Morality”, unable to see through this false dilemma or to extricate himself from it. Jesus Christ Himself, after a few passing references to his redeeming work, functions primarily as the Great Example, in whose footsteps we are to follow as an infallible guide to right moral living. At this point both fundamentalist Christianity and liberalism come very close together in their moralist outlook on life. In both Christian life gets reduced to keeping moral laws.
Finally, moralism is *unhistorical*. It transforms Biblical history into personality case-studies, drawing from them moral lessons, which, presumably, hold, without differentiation, for all time and under all circumstances. It doesn’t really matter for the moralist whether the passage at hand is found in Genesis or Isaiah, in Matthew or Revelation. “Before Christ” and “after Christ” play no decisive role in his thinking. He short-circuits the centrality of Christ’s redeeming work by drawing straight-line historical equations between the then-and-there and the here-and-now. By cancelling the unity and diversity of the historico-redemptive line, which runs consistently through the Old and New Testaments in the form of the promise-and-fulfilment motif, the moralist finds himself completely at a loss in doing justice to the opening words of Hebrews: “God, who in times past and in various ways, spoke to our fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son” — or in doing justice to the witness to God’s Word in our Catechism: “We know salvation from the gospel, which God himself first revealed in Paradise, afterwards published by the holy patriarchs and prophets and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law, and lastly fulfilled by his only begotten Son”. As Reformed Christians we must take the history of redemption seriously, for in it God reveals his way with his people and his world.

**MORE EXAMPLES**

By way of conclusion, let us once more test the moralist method in the light of this six-point critical analysis.

When the moralist discusses the David and Bathsheba affair, in the measure that he is consistent with his own method, he can never really get beyond the strong admonition: Don’t mess around with women, or you’re sure to get in trouble. He then adds that sin brings its own reward, that immorality drags us down deeper and deeper, and that A leads to B and B to C. Somehow the real depth-dimension of David’s iniquity escapes him, namely, that David’s multiple-sin threatened the very foundations of the theocracy which God had established with his people.

The moralist tends to read the words of Scripture in very superficial and simplistic ways. Take the parting words of Uncle Laban to his nephew Jacob: “The Lord watch between me and thee, while we are absent from each other”. Disregarding the historico-redemptive and cultural context, the
moralist quickly turns these words into a pious benediction appropriate to any farewell among believers. But that’s not what these words meant to Laban and Jacob. To them this was a solemn oath and warning. Experience had taught them that they could not trust each other. Laban was a double-crosser, Jacob a schemer. Now, as they turn their backs upon each other, they call upon the Lord to keep a watchful eye upon them to prevent the one from taking advantage of the other.

Again, in Old Testament times, if a soldier were charged with the safekeeping of a prisoner, it was his life for the prisoner’s, if the prisoner escaped. Once this actually happened, you recall. All the negligent soldier could say for himself was this: “While thy servant was busy with this and that, the prisoner escaped”. To the moralist this text is pregnant with meaning. Maybe it rings a bell in your minds too. One can almost hear it happen. This text, in the hands of the moralist, triggers a wide-ranging discourse on the moral evils of “being busy with this and that” — shot through, of course, with strong exhortations against becoming preoccupied with trifling matters.

Or try this one: King Hezekiah had given the Babylonian emissaries a grand tour of Jerusalem — the city, the temple, the palace, everything. The prophet of the Lord then confronts the king with this question: “What have they seen in thy house?” Intuitively, the moralist seizes upon this question, lifts it out of its context, and applies it moralistically to our lives today: When visitors drop in, what do they see in your house? A Bible on the coffee table? A wall plaque announcing your identity as a Christian? Church papers lying prominently on the counter? What have they seen in thy house? A question designed, of course, to arouse the conscience to moral self-examination.

On this next one, I caution you to hold your breath. The church bulletin announced the theme of the sermon in these words: “Borne by Four” — “based” (as they say) on Mark 2. The story is familiar: The house where Jesus was preaching, was so over-crowded that four men found it necessary to tear away the tiles and let their paralytic friend down into the presence of Jesus through a hole in the roof. In expounding on this gospel narrative, the moralist quickly discovers four points. These four benefactors were moved, first by sympathy, secondly by faith, then by perseverance, and finally (though it is not explicitly mentioned in this passage) surely they must have prayed about it
too. In the end it turns out then that the paralytic was not really borne by tour men, but by these four moral virtues — sympathy, faith, perseverance, and prayer. So, dear listeners, if your life is borne by these four great moral qualities, you too can accomplish great things for others. And what, I ask you, in all this pious prattle, happened to the healing power of Jesus Christ?

Finally, we turn to Acts, Chapter 12. We read there that Herod had put Peter in prison, intending, after the Passover, to bring him out to the people for trial and execution. The moralist makes quick work of translating the Jewish Passover into the Christian Easter. Thus, Herod “intending after Easter to bring Peter out for judgment” becomes the occasion for a discourse on “post-Easter intentions”, with the very obvious application: And what are your post-Easter intentions? To slip back into the same old routines? Or to turn over a new leaf and live a life of moral uprightness?

Along the way I have touched on the allegorical method of interpretation so typical of early Christianity and referred to the historical method so dominant in our times. We have just emerged from a more extensive discussion of the moralist method. It remains now to propose a Biblically-Reformed alternative to these and other hermeneutic models. This method of interpretation I shall call a “confessional hermeneutic”.

**CONFESSIONAL HERMENEUTIC**
To forestall misunderstanding, let it be said that the idea of “confessional” as used here should not be construed as carrying “subjectivist” overtones, as though Scripture were man’s word about God. For Scripture is more than a series of confessions arising from the religious spirit of Israel and the early church. It is primarily a Word from beyond, the Word of God addressed to the human situation. Accordingly, this “confessional hermeneutic” refers to that mode of expression which in reformational thought is designated as the “pistic” (from the Greek “pistis”, meaning “faith”) aspect of reality. It points to the basic, leading locus of religious certainty in human life — the “Here I stand” creed of the heart, that outward expression of the inner man Which discloses the ultimate point of assurance and certainty for every other historical function in our life-relationships as anchored in the good order of creation.
On this view, one’s hermeneutic is part and parcel of one’s world-view. A Biblically principled and structured world-view serves therefore as the framework-of-reference for a Biblical hermeneutic. Such a Biblical world-view must do justice to both the deeply religious unity and the rich diversity of our life expressions. The issues of our heart, the spiritual orientation point of our inner life, and the historical functions of our bodily life come to expression in an integrally coherent, orderly pattern of differentiated acts — namely, the confessional, moral, jural, aesthetic, economic, lingual, analytic, historical, social, psychic, and the rest. Among these vital functions the leading, guiding function is the confessional. It is this decisive function which defines the present elaboration of a “confessional hermeneutic”.

Our starting-point is the “heart”, out of which, says Scripture, are all the issues of life, including hermeneutics. For hermeneutics too is an activity of the heart, and thus of the whole man. Christian interpreters of Scripture must accordingly see their scholarship as rooted in a heart which seeks to lead every thought captive in obedience unto the Word of God in Jesus Christ. For He is the central and comprehensive meaning of God’s Word for creation and of God’s Word inscripturated. But how shall we work out this Christo-centric heart commitment in a Christo-centric hermeneutic?

The Bible remains our noetic doorway, our hermeneutic key. Turning then to Scripture we learn that Scripture is not God’s first Word to man. God also speaks in creation. Scripture is not a mere repetition of God’s creational revelation. Nor does Scripture replace God’s original revelation in creation. It is not a completely new Word of God. What we have in Scripture is, as it were, a “second revised edition” of God’s Word. It is a republication of God’s creational Word. In Scripture God’s Word comes to us in lingual form (“more fully and clearly”, Article II of the Belgic Confession). We must therefore take the very text of Scripture seriously. Moreover, in Scripture God’s Word comes to us in the language of redemption. It is given to renew our hearts, to open our eyes to see and our ears to hear what God has been revealing to us from the very beginning. Therefore the importance of a right understanding of Scripture
within the inter-related context of creation and redemption can hardly be overestimated.

Viewed in this light, Scripture is the divine-human witness to the mighty acts of God in the history of redemption. It speaks with full divine authority. It speaks to all of life. But how does it speak to life as a whole? What is the nature of its authority? We usually agree quickly that Scripture is not a handbook on science or politics or art or economics. Yet it does address God’s Word authoritatively and redemptively to all of these life activities, in fact, to the full range of our life-relationships. But how? In what way? Does Scripture have a particular “focus”? If so, what is that peculiar “focus”? And how shall we honour that “focus” in our hermeneutics?

CENTRAL “FOCUS”
In seeking to offer an answer to these questions, my major thesis is this: Scripture speaks with a “confessional focus”. Indeed, it speaks to politics, but it does not speak politically. It speaks to economics, but it does not speak in economic categories. It speaks to education, but it does not speak in educational concepts. It speaks to science, but it does not speak scientifically. It speaks to all these spheres in life, and all the rest too, but in its own unique way, with its own unique “focus”. That “focus” I am defining as a “confessional focus”.

This view of Scripture brings with it the recognition that every event in our life experience can be looked at from various points of view. Historical events are whole events. Yet there are various aspects to every historical event. This is true of biblical history too. In the mighty acts of redemption which constitute the very heart of biblical revelation there are clues pointing in this direction. One could, for example, analyse the political aspect of David’s rule or the economic aspect of Solomon’s rule. Scripture offers some rather extensive insights into such things. But they are incidental to its real message. They do not open up the central “focus” of Scripture.

Again, one could reflect on the apostle Peter from the point of view of his psychical make-up. Or one could study Paul’s mission to Jews, Greeks, and Romans in terms of a linguistic analysis: What languages did he use in proclaiming the Gospel? Something interesting and instructive could be said about these
aspects of Biblical history from what we know about the Bible and Bible times. But the central “focus” of the Biblical message is not political, economic, psychological, or linguistic. From what point-of-view then is the history of redemption told? Which aspect stands out? From what perspective does the Bible speak? My answer is this: from the “confessional” point-of-view. It speaks on all these things with a “confessional focus”.

These other aspects of historical reality are there. Otherwise the events in the history of redemption would not be real and whole events. They play their important roles. Now this aspect, then that one comes to the fore, but they are always subservient to the Scripture’s central “focus”. It is important to recognize these other aspects, for otherwise the “confessional focus” would come through in an empty and docetic way. David did engage in political activity; Solomon did establish certain ill-fated economic policies; Peter was moved by certain psychic impulses; Paul did use the Greek and Aramaic languages in his preaching. But such considerations are not central in Scripture. They are all subservient to the central “focus” of the history of redemption. In its most pregnant sense Scripture is not “about” David, Solomon, Peter, and Paul: it is all “about” Jesus Christ. What is primary is Scripture’s concentration upon the “confessional” meaning of the events recorded in their relatedness to Christ.

Scripture is a divine-human witness to real historico-redemptive events. But it is not an “objective” chronicle of historical events. It is not ordinary historiography. It is prophetic history, interpreted history, history with a point. It explicated the meaning of the unfolding drama of redemption, one act after another, but always within this “confessional focus”. What binds one historical event after another together into a unified pattern of Christocentric revelation is the Bible’s sustained emphasis upon the “confessional” meaning of these events.

**CONCRETIZING THIS “FOCUS”**

Look briefly at a few more Biblical samples chosen at random. Archeology is now able to paint a picture of Omri, King of Israel, far more detailed and illustrious than the very sober account given in the Bible. His international fame was apparently so great that foreigners referred to the whole land of Palestine as
“the House of Omri”. Yet Scripture passes all this by in silence. It disposes of Omri in seven brief verses (I Kings 16:21-28). How do we account for that? Such treatment of a royal personage reflects the kind of Book the Bible is. It sets Omri’s reign into Scripture’s own unique perspective. Within the historical context of buying the hill of Samaria and fortifying it, what we read of Omri is this: “Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did more evil than all who were before him. For he walked in the ways of Jerobeam, in the sins by which he made Israel to sin, provoking the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger with their idols”. That is the Bible’s way of “focussing in” on the whole life of Omri, stating in confessional language what is really of lasting importance about Omri, his (negative) contributions to the unfolding history of redemption on the way to the coming Christ.

Take another case. In the New Testament King Herod comes off looking very bad from the point-of-view of that which is Christo-centrically important in Biblical revelation. He is an agent of the dragon of Revelation 12 which stands ready to devour the Man-Child. Yet, from what we know about the political history of those times, Herod was a rather effective puppet ruler within the Roman regime. Why this contrast in perspectives? Once again, it is a matter of the Bible’s unique “focus”. Scripture does not deny Herod’s military prowess, his architectural accomplishments, his psychic problems. There are, in fact, allusions to these things in the Gospels. But Scripture passes a different kind of judgment upon those who play their supporting roles in the history of redemption. For through it all Christ is the central and leading Player in the drama of salvation. From the viewpoint of the “confessional focus” of Scripture what is most crucial about Herod is his embodiment of the spirit of the anti-Christ.

The same holds true for Pontius Pilate, and more positively, for Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and the apostles. In each case the Bible deals with the real lives of real people, who as whole men take part in whole events. Accordingly Scripture hits upon one aspect of these events after another. Sometimes it even plays up a certain aspect quite strongly. Take, for example, the psychic disorders in the later life of King Saul. But again this is for the sake of sharpening Scripture’s “confessional focus” on Saul as an anti-theocratic king. Saul’s psychic state is not an independent theme. This aspect of his life,
together with the political, economic, and cultic aspects, is there as the concrete historical framework for driving home this confessional message, “To obey is better than sacrifice...”. This means that we may not seek to derive psychological theories from the Saul passages. This is not the intent and purpose of Scripture. But Scripture does teach, confessionally, that no man — like Saul — can say “No, no, no” to God’s clear “Yes, yes, yes” — with respect to David — without such defiance taking its heavy toll in one’s life (“an evil spirit of the Lord came upon him”). God is not mocked. Such rebellion leads finally to the door of the witch of Endor’s house.

We give expression to this same “confessional focus” in many of our birth announcements. We thankfully proclaim on our printed cards: “The Lord has given us a child”, or “another child”, or “a son”, or “a daughter”. By such confessional statements we do not deny that sexual intercourse took place, nor that there was a nine-month waiting period, nor that a doctor attended the delivery, nor that medicines and expenses were involved, nor that the state issued a birth certificate. These varied aspects of that great event are real. Yet, after all is said and done, we mean to say that all the aspects making up that event are gathered up in the confession, “The Lord hath given”. That is our way of speaking Biblically and confessionally about childbirth. It takes the deepest meaning of the event and puts it into true and clear “focus”, in sharp contrast, for example, to birth announcements which reduce this event to economic categories: “Announcing a new income tax exemption”.

Scripture never speaks in such reductionist terms. Sometimes, indeed, Scripture plays heavily on the biotic motif, as, for example, in the untimely, unexpected, even “impossible” birth of Isaac to the aged Abraham and Sarah. Sometimes political affairs loom large, as in the persistent troubles between the Judeans and Samaritans in rebuilding the temple. Sometimes the aesthetic gets large attention, as in descriptions of the grandeur of Solomon’s temple. Sometimes social relations play an important role, as in the conflicts between Jewish and Gentile believers in the early church. Nevertheless, to reduce the Biblical message to one or another of these aspects is to miss the mark hermeneutically. All these aspects play a role subservient to the central, leading, dominant “confessional focus” of Scripture, namely its consistent witness in its total extent and in all its parts to the redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ. As light passes through a prism,
so Scripture takes these diverse rays of light and concentrates them in this “confessional focus”: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself”.

This confessional hermeneutic finds strong support in the message of Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord build the house, those who build it labour in vain; unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”. The Psalmist is not “spiritualizing” this building project. Real lumber and brick and mortar are involved. Nor does the Psalmist deny that it takes a lot of down-to-earth planning, saving, and working to get the job done. Building a house is hard work. All kinds of physical, economic, aesthetic, social, juridical, and even ethical considerations enter into such an undertaking. Yet, with its own unique “focus”, like an x-ray exposure, Scripture cuts through all the hard realities of human toil and gets at the heart of the matter by proclaiming: Without the blessing of the Lord all the sweat and tears (or joy and hardship) are in vain, empty, without content and meaning. Without God’s blessing the house defeats its real purpose for existence. The house (its foundations, walls, roof) may still stand, but it no longer stands for obedient service in family living.

The same is true for guarding a city. Woe to the watchman who falls asleep at his post! Yet e’en if the watchmen stand guard day and night, and even if the guard is doubled and tripled, all these extra precautions will not help unless the Lord watches over the city to protect it. See, this is the “confessional focus” of the Biblical message.

Such a confessional hermeneutic is helpful in seeking to do justice to Scripture both as history of redemption and as history of redemption. It offers a hermeneutic key to help unlock the centrally and comprehensively Christocentric meaning of Biblical revelation. It brings with it some built-in safeguards against reductionist interpretations of the Bible, whether they be the moralist reductionisms of the exemplary method or the historical reductionisms of the historico-critical method. It offers promising possibilities for confessional scholarship, that is, scholarship which is in harmony with the Reformed confessions concerning the nature of Biblical authority. It overcomes the ever-present tendency toward dualist-dialectical tensions between confession and scholarship. In this hermeneutic faith and science can be kept together in an integrally unified and meaningful working relationship.
VII SIGHTINGS AND POINTERS

With this we come now to the beginning of the end of this series of Biblical sightings related to Christian scholarship. Looking back, as it turns out, this has become both a big and little book at the same time. Big in the sense of donning the “spectacles” and probing the wide horizons of our academic callings. Little in the sense that it hardly goes beyond erecting some signposts for us to get our bearings for further explorations. Certain constraints upon its size preclude any pretence to speaking the last word. This work therefore leaves behind plenty of unfinished business. Perhaps, however, it does offer a few promising insights to shape an ongoing agenda for scholarly reflection.

Based on the sightings briefly sketched in the preceding discussions, we turn now to a few concluding pointers.

The aim of these pointers is to move the earlier orientational ideas closer to actual educational practice. We will accordingly touch on issues related to the structure and function of learning institutions, together with the curriculum-planning, pedagogy, research, and actual teaching-learning process going on there. These pointers are more than randomly chosen. They reflect a certain sorting-out process, a selection, moreover, not altogether unrelated to our earlier explorations. I shall arrange them in a series of seven points.

THE IDEA OF ACADEMY
1. Home is home, church is church, and state is state. So also the academy is an academy. This is more than a truism. It is a way of stating very simply and succinctly that the academy (here understood as including universities, colleges, seminaries, and other institutions of higher education) that the academy has an identity and integrity of its own. It takes its own unique place and plays its own unique role among the various other institutions in society. Like every earthly institution the academy has a limited authority and competence. It cannot be all things to all people.

Until recently modern societies have exuded almost unbounded confidence in the so-called assured results of the scientific method. The academy, as the citadel of science, has often been venerated as the messiah eminently qualified to heal
all the maladies of our world. That quasi-religious trust has now largely evaporated. The myth of scientific objectivity and omniscience has been exploded. A more realistic assessment of the potentials of the academy has emerged. These trends have served, obliquely at least, to reinforce the point that even the most high-powered learning centres have only a limited, yet distinctive and important contribution to make to the life of the larger community.

Taking advantage of insights articulated by reformational thought, let it be slid that the academy is a place for theoretical reflection upon created reality. That is its unique window upon God’s world. Such disciplined analysis defines the parameters of its peculiar culturally-formative task. The entire cosmos falls within its scholarly purview — the politics of the Roman Empire, the economics of the open market system, the aesthetics of a Rembrandt painting, And all the rest. In principle, nothing — whether organic or inorganic, whether belonging to the plant, animal or human kingdom — is excluded. But to each its own. For the academy this means focussing on systematic inquiry, experimentation, evaluation and directives for reformation. The academy may, for instance, study banking, but it is not a bank. It may study family life, but it is not a family. It may study the political process, but it is not a political organization. Primarily and centrally the academy is for theoretical inquiry aiming at getting things straight. It aims at clarity of thought, pointing toward appropriate action. In this way it can exercise a critical function and shape responsible leadership. By thus doing what it can do best the academy can serve its supporting community and be a blessing for society at large.

**CURRICULUM AND CREATIONAL ORDER**

2. What holds for the relationship of the university to other societal institutions also holds within the university for its curriculum. Here also a Principled and structured view of reality is crucial. Without it curriculum building rests on shaky ground Stable curriculum planning needs to be firmly anchored in a settled world-view. Otherwise it becomes a political football kicked I round between competing interests.

Recent decades have witnessed feverish efforts at curriculum reform. Key phrases are innovation, creative relevance, and flexibility. In many cases this trend has created a veritable curricular jungle. Now, it seems, this trend I as run its course. Reaction has set in. The current mood is “hack to the basics”.

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These seemingly incessant pendulum-like movements compel educators to reflect anew on the first-order question of the religio-philosophical basis of the curriculum.

The issues we face are therefore these: By what standard do we shape curriculum? What is our ultimate appeal in justifying a given curriculum? Is it to be determined by the perennial concerns of mankind? Or by current vocational options? Or by prevailing market opportunities? Or by pressing international crises? Or by what looms largest in the popular mind? Or by the demands of student recruitment? Or by student interest? Or by the priorities of the academic community?

Giving in to such existentialist pressures results in highly arbitrary perceptions of curriculum. For behind this conglomerate of curricular views lies a large complex of shifting criteria which come and go with changing times. The concerns expressed in them are, of course, not unimportant. They must be taken into account. They may even shade our decisions. But they can hardly serve as solid norms for curriculum development. Any curriculum designed to offer a stable course of studies, with resilience and a measure of enduring relevance, calls for an ontic base.

A Biblical perspective on Christian scholarship accordingly points in the direction of the creational order. The various disciplines are then definable as theoretical inquiries into the various aspects of created reality. Thus each discipline focuses on its peculiar facet of our life together in God’s world with its numerous creatures great and small, its inorganic materials, plant life, animals, human culture and conduct, and our various societal institutions. Biologists, for example, deal with the biotic aspect of created reality, the psychologist with the psychic aspect, the linguist with the lingual aspect, the ethicist with the moral aspect, and so on.

In this view God’s good order for life lays its claim upon all scholars, believers and unbelievers alike. For these structures are common to all. We all do our work in the same world. The spiritual antithesis of which Scripture speaks is indeed very real — also in the realm of scholarship. Scholars are not immune to these directional differences. The conflict of religious convictions is unmistakably evident across the board in scientific enterprise. At the same time,
however, there are the common structures and functions of created reality which hold for all scholars in every branch of learning. In a very strange, yet equally real sense, it can be said that, in the measure that Christian and non-Christian scholars work out their conflicting commitments consistently, they have nothing in common religiously, while simultaneously they have everything in common structurally. This is the profound ambiguity of our present situation: There is a structural and functional commonality in the midst of this awesome spiritual and directional antithesis. And this is also true in curriculum construction.

The distinctiveness of Christian scholarship must accordingly manifest itself precisely in that which is common to all curricula — not merely in the moral application of the results of science, nor in specifically Christian exercises and habits, nor in a healthier ethos permeating our work. Anchoring the curriculum in the creational order creates a common arena for frank and open dialogue among scholars representing different schools of thought.

**DIVERSITY IN UNITY**

3. We move on now to a more nuanced consideration of curriculum, namely, its unity and diversity. These ideas too are grounded in the ontic order of created reality. In the light of the Scriptures we come to recognize that the cosmos has a wholeness to it. At bottom it is of one piece. Its marvellous complexities are bound together in a harmonious pattern of interlacing coherence. God’s Word addresses his creatures in the integrity of their existence.

Think for a moment of the Biblical view of man. There is a basic oneness to human life. It has a centeredness to it, a fundamental simplicity, focussed in the Biblical idea of the heart. This fundamental wholeness stands as an indictment upon the Greek dualisms which have lodged themselves so deeply in much of traditional Christian anthropology. In large measure these dualist constructs have also been carried over into curriculum planning. The alleged dichotomy between a rational soul and a mundane body have led to false dilemmas between thinking and doing, between pure science and applied science, between doctrine and ethics. Curricular houses so internally divided cannot long endure. They may, of course, continue to stand in the sense of perpetuating themselves over long periods of time. This has actually happened. And such dualistically structured scholarship is still with us today. While they stand, however, they fail to stand for
a unified view of man and the world. They therefore also fall short of offering a unified course of studies. Indeed they contribute to turning universities into multiversities.

Within the Reformed tradition this idea of the integrally unified coherence of all created reality has been formulated in the concept of sphere-universality. Honouring this principle lends a sense of wholeness and direction as one moves from Discipline A in Room 102 to Discipline B in Room 203.

But this is only half the story. A concomitant idea is that of sphere-sovereignty. It is the corollary to the idea of sphere-universality. For woven into the very fabric of created reality, both in man and in the cosmos as a whole, is a richly diversified spectrum of aspects of meaning. No single human science, for example, takes on a study of everything about man’s life. From the total range of human life-expressions each discipline abstracts and pays special attention to its own unique aspect of the whole man. This then becomes the focus for its in-depth analysis. The same holds true in the other sciences. Physical sciences deal, say, with the movement of glaciers; biological sciences with the environmental impact of pesticides; political science with legal systems within human communities; theology with confessional utterances.

As a single shaft of light, passing through a prism, gets refracted into a rainbow of colours, so the cosmic unity and our human wholeness manifest themselves in richly diversified modes of existence. Every responsible philosophy of education must somehow account for this diversity-in-unity.

Reformational thought has sought to capture the significance of these two dimensions of created reality in the complementary ideas of sphere-universality and sphere-sovereignty. Together they carry with them promising insights for shaping curriculum. Sphere-universality opens up the possibilities for interdisciplinary projects and group studies among kindred disciplines. Such team efforts can be undertaken knowledgeably only when there is clarity concerning the nature of the various disciplines involved. This points to the importance of sphere-sovereignty, which highlights the identity and integrity of each discipline. This idea offers resistance, moreover, to the current tendency to blur the boundaries between the various sciences. It cautions us against the confusion created by existentialist streams of thought which assert that
“psychology is whatever psychologists happen to do”, and that likewise “theology is what theologians choose to do”. In such definitions all sense of a creational order is eclipsed. Curriculum development then slips into a quagmire of purely situational and relativist opinions, far removed from any possible appeal to a normative order which transcends the status quo.

But is not such an ontically-based curriculum bound to be very static and detached? Does not such an appeal to creational order render it impotent in grappling with life’s hard realities? Some are convinced that this is so. As an alternative they therefore advocate an issue-oriented, problem-solving approach to curriculum. Their case, however, is hardly decisive or persuasive. For such structured contours for curriculum building do not put one out of touch with reality. In principle nothing is excluded from a curriculum based on the lawfulness and orderliness of creation. Criticisms advanced appear to imply a false dilemma between a structured perspective and practicality. Actually, however, nothing is as practical as good structure. Without it decision-making is reduced to arbitrary choices. Curriculum planning then comes to rest upon one ad hoc decision after another, devoid of much consistency.

Implied in this criticism, it seems, is also a wrong notion of the relationship between theory and practice. If curriculum is understood as an ordered set of disciplines engaging in theoretical inquiry into the various aspects of created reality, is this not an elitist ivory-tower withdrawal from the down-to-earth issues of yesterday, today, and tomorrow? Again the answer must be, “not necessarily so”. For theory and practice belong to the same world of experience. They work with the same data, though differently. They represent two different ways of knowing the same kinds of things. In practice, for example, many people have a hunch that weather patterns throughout the world are undergoing some significant changes. By careful scientific analysis theoreticians could conceivably clarify this question, perhaps confirming such feelings, or refuting them, or qualifying them. In terms of this view theoretical reflection and practical experience are no more than two ways of gaining knowledge, with the former building upon the latter. A curriculum thus dedicated to theoretical inquiry in a disciplinary fashion can deepen, enrich, and broaden practical understanding. In this way the university can contribute serviceable insights for the life of the community at large.
With that we are back to the fundamental ideas of sphere-sovereignty and sphere-universality. The former stands as a constant reminder of the place and task of the academy in its relationships to other societal institutions. Within the academy it also prompts us to take seriously the identity and integrity of the several scientific disciplines. At the same time, the idea of sphere-universality emphasizes the importance of healthy partnerships between the academy and the surrounding institutions which form its societal context. It also urges upon us the prime importance of a unifying vision within the educational enterprise. Nothing can take the place of genuinely communal Christian scholarship — teachers and students together committed to doing their curricular work well, illumined and directed by these Biblical perspectives on our well-ordered life in God’s world.

**SCRIPTURE, WORLD-VIEW, AND PARADIGMS**

4. Articulating a Christian philosophy of education is not a simple matter. It involves some very complex issues. If this were not so, we would have settled these questions long ago and would have found it easy to reach a ready consensus. As it is, however, the challenge of gaining greater clarity on the meaning of Christian scholarship continues to engage the best of minds.

Clearly Christian scholarship has to do with taking the creational order seriously, and the lordship of Christ in learning, all in the light of Biblical revelation. Yet the question of Scripturally-directed education lives on as a vigorously debated issue. For many it is still highly problematic. For all of us it remains a matter of unfinished business on our academic agenda.

We often find Christians making too little of Scripture in their academic work. On the other hand, it is also possible to make too much of it. We are all familiar with literalist and biblicist tendencies. Accordingly, very simplistic, straight-line equations are often drawn from particular texts in Scripture to either more general or more concrete academic issues. To their credit let it be said that such Christian thinkers mean to give the Bible a full measure of devotion in their work. Often, moreover, such people appear to adopt such a hard-line hermeneutic in reaction of the soft-pedalling of Scripture by those who eclipse Biblical revelation in their academic pursuits. Yet reaction is seldom a final answer. In the end, therefore, both approaches reflect a misconstruction of the role of Scripture in Christian scholarship.
Let us therefore consider a better way, though, it must be forthrightly conceded, this better way is not the easiest way. But then, who ever said that life in a world of sin and grace would be easy? This better way calls, as a basic assumption, for the recognition of a creationally embedded distinction between theoretical and pre-theoretical activity. On this view, Scripture offers pre-theoretical perspectives and pointers for our academic work. Armed with such Biblical directives we then move on to work out the basic contours of a Christian world-view. Within this framework of reference then we must seek to articulate in more scientific-theoretical terms a Christian philosophy of education. This calls for a kind of three-stage movement, therefore, from Scripture, through a Christian world-view, to a Christian theoretical model for work in the academy.

As a case in point, consider once again that branch of knowledge known as anthropology. The Biblical message confronts us with a deeply and fully religious view of man. Scripture does not offer a theoretical model of human nature. Its intent and purposes are not to define the structures, make-up, and component parts of our constitution. These were given with creation. Rather, Scripture addresses us in a spiritually holist way as we stand in a revelation/response relationship before the face of God. It does not duplicate God’s Word for creation. Rather, given man’s creation in the image of God, and given also the life-distorting effects of sin, Scripture redirects us to being human as we were meant to be. Its teaching on man is not structural, but directional.

In the light of Scripture, then, and appealing to its “anthropological” pointers, we can then return to the “anthropological” givens of creation to develop a semi-systematic view of our way of being human in both the unity and the diversities of our various life-relationships. This yields a kind of middle-model of man available to all thinking Christians. This Christian scholars can share with their communities. But with this Christians in the human sciences can also move on to anthropology proper. This would call for a more penetrating analysis of our human way of being what we are and doing what we do. Out of such a critical process of research might well come an intensely theoretical paradigm of man. Such Biblically-directed excursions into the sometimes heady realm of scholarship are part of our cultural mandate. Such scientific exploration is, of course, human work, and is therefore fallible and always open
to review and revision. It therefore calls for a large dose of humility and tentativity. Such theoretical work demands that we be rigorously critical in laying bare t -le scientific presuppositions which undergird our scholarship and that of ethers. For such assumptions are usually deeply principled and firmly held, whether consciously so or not. Hidden assumptions especially must be smoked out. For such assumptions are extremely decisive in all scientific activity. Though these first-order ideas are not the last word. given a goodly measure of consistency, they usually prove to be very formative of bottom-line conclusions as well as the scientific processes adopted all along the way leading up to these end-results. Nothing is gained by overlooking these theoretical starting-points.

The fundamental questions of scientific methodology must also be carefully scrutinized. It belongs to each discipline to develop methods appropriate to its own unique field of investigation. For there is no single scientific method. Methods are as differentiated as the various disciplines -historical methods are of as little use in chemistry as mathematical methods in language studies. Methodological decisions are far from arbitrary, nor are they religiously neutral or value-free. Wrong choices in method create all kinds of internal discrepancies and anomalies in the scientific enterprise. They are likely to even compromise or contradict the professed principles upon which scholarship rests. Borrowing methods from alien philosophical systems is bound to subvert even the best of scientific intentions. One can therefore hardly expect to carry on coherent and fruitful Christian scholarship in any discipline if one should incorporate into one’s work positivist, or pragmatic, or behaviorist methodologies. Christian scholarship calls not only for choosing self-consciously to stand within a Scripturally-directed philosophical perspective and to rely upon Scripturally-normed presuppositions and principles, but also to forge Scripturally-informed methods, procedures, and tools of analysis.

TRIANGULAR MODEL
5. Dualist patterns of thought have proven to be very seductive and deeply ingrained. Almost invariably they give rise to false dilemmas. One such false dilemma which has haunted western scholarship throughout the modern period, causing it to swing back and forth in pendulum-like fashion between two competing poles, is the problem of the subject-object relationship. This issue is basic to a host of other issues. Are you a subjectivist or an objectivist? That is the
question. It is generally assumed, moreover, that this choice exhausts the number of viable positions and that these two views of reality are mutually exclusive. Locking itself into this closed mind-set, western scholarship has demonstrated little real openness to consider the possibility of an authentic third-way, a genuine alternative — except, of course, for the Kantian synthesis of objectivism and subjectivism. At bottom, however, the fusion of these two horizons amounts to little more than a magnificently conceived variation on the same basic twofold theme. Objectivity and subjectivity are still assumed to be the only basic factors operative in accounting for human knowledge. Therefore attempts to escape this dilemma have proven to be a largely illusory ideal.

This false dilemma, therefore, continues to becloud western scholarship. The fundamental question which it poses is this: Where to locate the norm for human understanding?

On the one hand we are confronted by the subjectivists. They are represented mostly by the idealist, humanist, and existentialist traditions. For them the norm of truth resides in human subjectivity. The mind of man is the measure of all things. The rational subject imposes its norms upon the objective data which enter our world of experience. The thinking self takes the random sense perceptions which come our way and lends them meaning. Reason orders reality. It converts raw materials into finished products. Some subjectivists attribute this to individual reason, others to universal reason. In either case, however, human rationality shapes and moulds its own world of value systems. In some such way subjectivists are intent on preserving the freedom ideal of human personality.

Perched uneasily atop the other horn of this dilemma is an opposite school of thought, the objectivists. Their view of reality, objectivism, finds its strongest advocates in the empiricist and positivist camps. Such thinkers locate the norm of truth outside human subjectivity. It has an out-there-ness status. Truth confronts us as a settled state-of-affairs within a closed continuum. It resides in the phenomena which have an impact on our lives. Facts are real, true, and stubborn, and they don’t lie. The human mind is accordingly viewed as a clean slate, with the self-evident facts of the matter being like fingers which inscribe their message upon our minds. In such circles the “myth of objectivity” is still
alive and well. The science ideal, based on determinist assumptions about the nature of the universe, is decisive.

These two quite diametrically opposed world-views reflect one of the most fundamental religio-philosophical dilemmas in western thought. In an objectivist view, reality-out-there plays the active role, with its data impressing themselves formatively upon the receptive and docile mind of man. According to subjectivists, however, human rationality serves as the active processor of brute facts impinging themselves upon us.

Upon critical analysis in the light of Biblical perspectives, it appears that neither view is all wrong. But neither view is all right either. Both have correctly sensed something about the nature of created reality. Both point to certain elements of truth which characterize the lawfulness and orderliness of our life in God’s world. Subjectivists discern correctly something of the divinely ordained order which holds for human understanding. Objectivists too discern correctly something of the good order which holds for created reality around us. Both, however, are also guilty of distorting these insights by failing to paint the full picture, by reducing the whole story to one of its parts, by absolutizing that which is only relatively true, and by misplacing the norm which governs scholarship. Little wonder, then, that most scholars conclude that both ontically and epistemically neither objectivism nor subjectivism can be worked out consistently. When viewed independently and as being mutually exclusive, neither paradigm is tenable. Both create insuperable anomalies. In view of these considerations, the strong appeal of the Kantian synthesis is quite understandable. Yet this grand design too falls short of offering a real break-through. It is not an authentic alternative. At best it is a mediating position, carving out a common-ground arena within which the tensions between subjectivism and objectivism can be held together in an uneasy balance. The underlying dilemma, however, remains unresolved. For alien starting-points resist unified outcomes.

So far we have limited ourselves to an internal critique of the subjectivist-objectivist problem. We turn now to a more fundamental critical analysis. Against the background of a Biblically-directed view of the creational order, it is clear that neither objectivism, nor subjectivism, nor a synthesis of the two can stand the test of a Christian world-view. For all such methods of doing
scholarship are basically secular in the sense of excluding from meaningful consideration the Creator-creature relationship. Accordingly they entail a closed view of the universe. The only operative criterion is the cause-and-effect law of analogy. Only immanentist methods are appropriate. Whatever may happen when in practice Christian scholars adopt such approaches to reality, in principle the awareness of a transcendent normativity play no decisive role. For the norm of scholarship gets located, not in the Word of the Creator, but somewhere in the cosmos, whether in man himself or in our outside world or in the dialectical interaction between them. One may still drop some pious-sounding passing references to God. Basically, however, by methodologically eclipsing the “vertical” dimension, the scope of the scientific enterprise gets reduced to its “horizontal” dimensions. The end result is then inevitably the secularization of the academy.

Christian scholarship need not lock itself into such false dilemmas. Informed by Biblical perspectives on the structures and functions of created reality, it can point the way toward a real alternative. For the light of Scripture leads us to recognize the Word of God as the transcendent norm which holds for all scientific activity. It lays its constant claim upon both subject and object in their interacting relationships to each other. Thus the door opens in the direction of a genuine third-way. A radically different model of reality emerges, as well as a significantly different paradigm for scholarship. Trying in our mind’s eye to get the picture into focus — the Biblical world-view shows up as a triangle. At the apex stands the norm, God’s Word. Along the base line, at the one corner of the triangle stands man, the thinking subject, and at the other corner the various objects of theoretical inquiry. This simple model suggests ways of escaping the longstanding subject-object problem. It meets the objections mentioned earlier which are inherent in this false dilemma. For in the triangular lineaments of this model we catch a glimpse of how the Word of God as the norm for Christian scholarship defines the role and function of both subject and object and the interacting relationships between them. We can then begin to sense what it means to say that an honest-to-God’s-Word subjectivity is the best form of objectivity. What remains then is to flesh out more fully the contours of this skeletal model.

**AUTHORITY CENTRE**

6. This triangular model bears quite directly upon at least one controversial
issue in contemporary discussions of the teaching-learning process. Often the problem arises in this form: Is education to be teacher-directed? Or student-oriented? Or curriculum-centered? Whose concerns are to be decisive: Teachers or students or the educational experts who produce curricular materials for teaching and learning? Once again the basic question confronting us is this: Where to locate the norm in education? All too often again we allow ourselves to become ensnared in troublesome false dilemmas. If the authority-centre is viewed as residing in the teacher, are we then committed to an authoritarian spirit in the classroom? If in the student, have we then capitulated to a permissivist notion of democratic education? If in the subject-matter which passes back and forth between teachers and students, have we then surrendered the academy to the expertise of curriculum makers?

Accepting this statement of the problem spells trouble. We then thrust ourselves into a labyrinth of competing pressures from which there is no safe escape. We then entangle ourselves in a more concretely pedagogical form of the threadbare subject-object dilemma. If the teacher, the student, and the curriculum are embraced as the only relevant factors in scholarship, then again we have painted ourselves into a corner where education gets reduced to a purely horizontalist, low-level, secular enterprise.

Any Christian scholarship worthy of that name cannot tolerate an eclipse of the “vertical” dimension. Recognition of it must, moreover, go beyond shibboleths. It must se to concretize the norms of God’s Word as they hold in the full range of our academic pursuits. As a starter, at least, here too the triangular model offers some rudimentary insights. It helps keep the windows open to the transcendent normativity of God’s Word. That Word lays its claim upon all aspects of academic life. It delineates the office of student:: and the office of teachers, as well as the role of research and the curriculum as bridges linking all participants together in this joint venture. Once again, this sketchy vision calls for scholars to work it out in greater detail.

**NORM/FORM HERMENEUTICS**

7. Repeatedly throughout this book the case made for Christian scholarship has staked its claim upon an appeal to Biblical perspectives and pointer,. Implicitly and explicitly this argument rests upon the reality and relevance of unmistakable principles, guidelines, and directives given in, with, and through
the Scriptures. All this now stands unabashedly as a frank a’firmation of the indispensable role of Biblical authority in fulfilling our several callings as Christian scholars. In this concluding section let us now deal very directly and concretely with the actual text of Scripture in seeking to discover its message for our work. Perhaps the most useful way to do this is to take a look at a number of sample passages.

In this exegetical exercise I propose, as a hermeneutic tool of understanding, the use of what I shall call the norm/form distinction. It must be clear that this is a distinction between two aspects of the text, not a divorce or a division. For in Scripture norm and form always go hand in hand. Biblical norms come to us in certain culturally-related forms. Thus, while in Biblical revelation form and norm are never distinct, they are distinguishable; though never separate, they are analytically separable. We can, and may, and (it seems) must think them apart. We recognize, accordingly, that many of the forms in which the Biblical message is unfolded are no longer binding upon us. Yet embedded in those forms of revelation are norms which lay their abidingly authoritative claim upon us. In keeping with this norm/form distinction, how then can Christians handle aright the written Word in such a way as to experience through it the redirecting power of the Spirit in their scholarship? Note the following cross-cut samples.

A. In Deuteronomy 14:21 we read: “You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk”. What are we to make of this Biblical injunction? It is, of course, taken from the Torah — God’s law given through Moses to Israel. The Deuteronomy context, however, offers no real clues. It seems to simply stand there as one in a series of divine commands. What did it mean for Israel? And what does it mean for us?

A number of possible interpretations have been advanced. Sensitive people in the humanist tradition, lovers of all forms of life and deeply attached to animals, respond intuitively by saying, Of course not! How abhorrent and repulsive! Such gruesome practices must be banned! Hebrew rabbis, on the other hand, regard this decree as a proof-text for Jewish kosher regulations which forbid the mixing of meat and dairy products in authorized diets. Both of these interpretations fail to reckon adequately with the distinction between form and norm.
There is, I submit, a better reading of this text. We must keep in mind the uniquely redemptive calling of Israel as it took its place among the surrounding peoples. In Canaanite circles boiling a kid in its mother’s milk was part of their pagan cult. Such practices took place at heathen shrines in the company of male and female prostitutes. It was integrated into their fertility rites, designed to induce greater fertility in flock and fields.

If Israel were to emulate their neighbours by engaging in such practices, even if this were done in a non-cultic setting, it would blur their identity as a special people. Israel’s spiritual integrity as a chosen nation was therefore at stake. From this it follows that the specific form of this prohibition is no longer of decisive importance today. In our diets we need no longer be concerned to avoid serving milk and meat dishes in the same meal. Embedded in this strange injunction, however, is nevertheless an abiding norm which still echoes with a ring of authority. We, like Israel, are to avoid every form of cultural accommodation which would compromise our identity and integrity as a Christian community within society. This injunction, thus interpreted, still speaks with compelling normativity to those ever-present seductive pressures which, under the guise of patriotism and national self-interest, lure us into some form of civil religion.

B. Take another example. Appeals have been made to the idea of theocracy in the Old Testament to argue that monarchy, Israel’s form of government, is divinely ordained for every nation and for all time. Such an interpretation also involves a confusion of form and norm. The political form of Israel’s government is not universally normative.

Yet the institution of kingship in Israel reflect a political norm which transcends Israel and still holds today. Forms of government may change with changing situations. Such variations are evident even in Israel’s history Political struct Tres must suit a given people’s background, culture, traditions, state of civil readiness, anc’ other such factors. The normative consideration, however, is this: Whatever the form of government, it is obliged to honour the sovereignty of God in the life of the state and accordingly to administer public justice equitably. This norm stands.

C. Consider one more example from the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 22:8 we read: “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof,
that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if any one fall from it”. Most houses that we are familiar with have no such safeguards. Is this a case of flagrant disobedience? After all, this specification is stated unambiguously in the Biblical building code — “Put a rail around your roof”. Once again, it depends on whether this command is to be taken as universally binding.

In ancient Israel this injunction obviously made good sense. Given its prevailingly dry climate the purpose of a roof went far beyond offering protection from the elements. It also served as a place to thresh grain, dry clothes, tend children to play, sleep guests, and even hide spies.

In our world roofs are built with very different things in mind. This command therefore no longer holds for us in its original form. Yet the form of this command must not blind us to its moment of truth. What then is the abiding norm here? According to the central love-command, we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. In the sixth word of the Decalogue, this neighbourly love is further articulated in the call to respect our neighbour’s life and well-being. Applied to the conditions of Israel’s housing developments, this love-command to protect life gets concretized in the imperative to erect a rail around the roof.

What form shall we give to this abiding norm in our twentieth century technological age? Perhaps a handrail on our stairways. Or safety glass in our doors. Or smoke alarms. Or seat belts in our automobiles. Or barrier-free access to our church buildings. So the list grows.

D. Moving along now to the gospels, is there any meaningful way in which we today can still respond obediently to the foot-washing episode there in the upper room on the evening before Good Friday? Taken at face value, its claim upon us is unmistakably clear. Christ Himself puts it to us in these words:

*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you* (John 13:14-15).

Yet who among us actually observes this practice? We neglect Christ’s call to
wash feet without pangs of conscience. And rightly so. For here is a form of discipleship quite appropriate to the first century Palestinian situation where, in coming together for communal meals, people had no choice but to walk dusty roads on sandaled feet on the way to reclining at low-slung tables. We today in our western world gather for our sacramental meal under very different circumstances. Our feet hardly touch dust — given socks and shoes, carpeted automobiles, paved parking lots and sidewalks, polished floors and pews. For us this form of obedience makes little sense. It would be very unnatural, lacking any real analogy to daily experience.

Yet Christ’s word still stands. It still speaks to us authoritatively and normatively. In this transient form of discipleship we must seek to honour the abiding norm embedded in it. That norm, here and now as well as then and there, is this: In Christ’s name render humble service born of love to one another. It is incumbent upon us to find twentieth-century forms of obedient response to this norm which are no less appropriate to our situation than foot-washing was in Jesus’ day.

E. A similar hermeneutic holds in seeking to understand Paul’s stern warning about women worshipping without a veil (I Corinthians 11:2-16). One consideration (along with several others) in interpreting this troublesome passage appears to be the prevailing social mores of the Greco-Roman world. In Corinthian society (as is still true in some Near Eastern countries) it was regarded as offensive for respectable women to appear in public without a head-covering. Only women of ill-repute violated this custom. In this practice too social sensitivities have changed dramatically. In our world few Christian women feel obliged to wear a veil, or even a hat, at worship services.

Yet Paul’s words are still God’s Word to us today. In considering the social aspect of this issue, the relevant norm appears to be this: Let the Christian community, as it gathers in worship, grace itself with fitting attire, adopting styles of dress which will not occasion misunderstanding or give offence to others. In Paul’s day this took the form of women adorning themselves with a head-dress. We must now ask how that same norm holds in our day.

F. The Corinthian church, it seems, was beset with many problems — one of which was Christians engaging in lawsuits. As Paul puts it, “... Brother goes to
law against brother, and that before unbelievers”, before pagan judges, “... those least esteemed by the church”. In this unhealthy situation Paul calls for the appointment of a “wise man to decide between members of the brotherhood” (I Corinthians 6:1-8). He calls, as it were, for the appointment of a Christian ombudsman, a court of appeals within the Christian community.

What are we to make of this in our world today? Is Paul issuing an abiding norm to the effect that Christians should never become involved in civil suits before secular courts? The norm appears to be: Seek justice or else endure personal loss.

Given the pagan legal system of Paul’s day, he advocates a Christian alternative to the miscarriage of justice and the absence of a Biblical sense of righteousness inherent in the Greco-Roman judiciary system. Christians appearing before such a tribunal could hardly expect to get a good hearing. Moreover, in terms of their standing in society, there was more to be lost than gained.

What about Christian communities living in our modern secular society? The norm of justice and/or self-sacrifice still holds. What form shall it take among us today? Normatively the civil magistrate is ordained by God to redress wrongs. But what courses of action are Christians to pursue in anti-normative situations, if the courts of the land fail to act justly? If radically secular, ideologically distorted, anti-Christian spirits are in control? Perhaps then we too are bound to create alternative forms of administering justice in settling matters of internal dispute.

Summarizing the discussion to this point, let us pause for a moment to restate the thesis. Hermeneutically this norm/ form distinction offers serviceable insights for handling aright God’s written Word in Christian scholarship. It helps in the process of Biblical exegesis. For this method of interpretation serve’s to open up the basic principles and patterns of development within Biblical revelation. Within that overall perspective it shapes our understanding of the more specific pointers embedded in the Biblical message. In this way the norm/ form distinction also illumines scientific issues as they arise in Christian scholarship. Thus it gives direction to Christian scholars in their theoretical reflection upon matters of practical importance in our daily experience.

G. Let us now proceed to further concretize these ideas by focusing on the
major Biblical idea of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-24; Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:14-30). It is no over-statement to speak of a dramatic rediscovery of the far-reaching importance of the Jubilee concept in recent times. It has come to play a critical role in shedding the light of Scripture upon a large complex of very crucial contemporary issues in the areas of social, economic, and political relationships, vocational choices, the stewardship of creational resources, all of them bearing directly upon personal and communal decisions in the use of land, foodstuffs, goods, time, and energy, not to mention the overriding questions of war and peace.

In Israel every seventh day was to be a sabbath, and every seventh year a sabbatical. Every seventh sabbatical year, in turn, was to reach its climax in the Year of Jubilee — every fiftieth year. Whether Israel ever actually observed this very challenging rule of God for the life of his people in the promised land is uncertain. The societal forms for keeping Jubilee were apparently extremely demanding for Israel. They seem utterly unthinkable under modern conditions of life with its impoverished millions of people. On the basis of the norm/form distinction, moreover, let be added immediately that they can no longer be applied literally to our lives in their Israelite form. Yet the norms of the Jubilee message are still the touchstone of blessing or judgment in our world today. The Biblical idea of Jubilee carries with it a number of norms to which Christian scholars can appeal in making their theoretical work serviceable in the life of the Christian community and society at large. The following five pointers hold as much today as ever.

1. With God there is always a new beginning. Again and again, upon every sabbath, every sabbatical, every Jubilee our troubled world needs to hear this gracious reminder, which is at the same time an urgent call to renewal. The sins of the fathers’ need not forever haunt their children and children’s children. The sins of the past and present need not pursue us to our grave. Over and over again God opens the door to the new age in Jesus Christ. Through repentance and reformation we can repeatedly start afresh. We can always turn over a new leaf and write a new chapter in our lives. Old, worn-out theories, methods, and paradigms, which are out-of-step with God’s good order for life, need no longer hold us in bondage. This Jubilee pattern of restoration echoes and re-echoes across the pages of Scripture. God’s future stands ever open. Jubilee therefore banishes fatalistic despair.
2. Jubilee calls us to concern for the creation. For the earth and everything in it is the Lord’s. As good stewards we must make it the object of our tender, loving care. It is not ours to do with as we jolly well please. For the cosmos too participates in covenantal fellowship with its Maker and Redeemer. There can therefore he no excuse for raping and exploiting it. The next generation too needs a shalom-filled habitat. And what kind of earth do we wish to present to our Lord upon his return? The way this aspect of Jubilee gets opened up in Scripture offers some promising leads, especially for the earth sciences.

3. Jubilee also means caring for people. This semi-centennial festival was to be a time of family reunions, a time to return to the family homestead, a time to renew the bonds of friendship and the ties of kinship. Jubilee was meant to recreate a loving arena for fellowship and communal activity, for no man is an island. We are joined together in a network of life-relationships which shape who we are for one another and what we are called to do about it. In Christ these jubileed relationships are ours to have and hold, to cherish and to nurture from this time forth forevermore. Certainly this aspect of Jubilee opens windows, especially for the human sciences.

4. Jubilee offers hurried people the gift of time — time to pause long enough to look to God and listen to his Word. It carves out time to reflect on the meaning, orientation, and direction of life. Where have we come from? Where are we going? What are we doing here? Time for serious reflection is a precious gift, which in our busy schedules we are tempted to overlook. Scholarly conferences, seminars and workshops, and just plain informal bull-sessions are important links in communal Christian scholarship. Even coffee-breaks can serve as little sabbaths along the way.

5. Finally, Jubilee means the forgiveness of debts. It makes possible wiping the slate clean and starting over anew. In Israel Jubilee was a time for the release of slaves. By revelational extension it also suggests strongly liberation for those held captive by the principalities and powers of darkness enthroned in many learning centres in our day. It is a time to cancel all kinds of enervating indebtedness — the ruthless extraction of debts by greedy and power-hungry tycoons in the market-places of our world, as well as the wrongly imposed and wrongly accepted sense of indebtedness which many Christian scholars feel toward misdirected scientific theories in the marketplace of academic ideas today. Jubilee is a call to lift the trumpet of Christian freedom and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its
inhabitants — including the proclamation of a Biblically-directed sense of academic freedom in all our halls of learning.

All this is ours in Jesus Christ. In his Jubilee sermon at Nazareth He declared, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). He himself incorporated these ideas into the prayer He taught us to pray, the Lord’s Prayer, the fifth petition, in these words: “Jubilee us from our debts as we also jubilee those indebted to us”.

H. Christian scholarship finds its abiding charter in the creational order. Together with all other human callings, it too fell under the awesome weight of sin. But it is also part of that world of activities which God so loved that He gave his Son to redeem it. Thus we see that the Christian scientific enterprise participates fully in the Biblically-illumined drama of creation, fall, and redemption, on the way to the consummation of all things. Stated differently, both the cultural mandate (Genesis 1) and the mission mandate (Matthew 28) lay their joint claims upon Christian scholarship. This needs to be said most emphatically. For in times past, and still today, we are constantly confronted with the seemingly irresistible tendency to play these two mandates off against each other.

Often it is uncritically assumed, and sometimes strenuously argued, that the task of education belongs to the cultural mandate, whereas the mission mandate envisions a wholly different set of activities, namely witnessing, evangelism, and missionary work. This bifurcated view overlooks the unity of Biblical revelation — the promissory character of the Old Testament which reaches its fulfilment in the New Testament. Implicitly this view suggests that Genesis defines our “secular” tasks (including science), while Matthew defines our “spiritual” tasks.

The so-called “Great Commission” is indeed a mission mandate. But that mission — given originally to the disciples as the nucleus of the New Testament church, and in and through them also to us — embraces more than the work of apostles, ministers, evangelists, and missionaries. It is a “mission unlimited”. It embraces fisherman, such as Peter; and tentmakers, such as Paul; and physicians, such as Luke. Upon the basis of Christ’s claim to “unlimited authority”, it also embraces the work of Christian scholars. Their callings too fall under Christ’s call to an “unlimited task” — “observing all things that I have commanded you”. Christian scholars too, in their research and writing, in their
teaching-learning stations, in their curriculum planning and pedagogical strategies, are sustained by the promise of Christ’s “unlimited presence” — “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”.

The cultural mandate and the mission mandate participate accordingly in an integrally coherent way in the unfolding drama of the Biblical message. If therefore we appeal to Genesis apart from Matthew we are left with a secularized world-view On the other hand, taking Matthew apart from Genesis leads to a highly spiritualized world-view. The unity of Scripture obliges us instead to hold them together as a pre-fall statement and a post-fall redemptive restatement of the same mandate, as a creational publication and a redemptive republication.

From these different perspectives, both are addressed to the same reality — our calling in God’s world. There is no tension between the Word of God as Creator and his Word as Redeemer. Rather, Christ Jesus takes the Word of his Father, spoken in the beginning, and rearticulates it against the background of his finished work of reconciliation. The mission mandate is therefore a historico-redemptively updated restatement of the cultural mandate. This then is the abiding foundation of Christian scholarship, securely anchored in creation, reinforced in redemption, with its windows now open to the renewed earth under renewed heavens.