

APPENDIX: PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

This study has been undertaken as a Christian in the conviction that the philosophical endeavours of the Christian, as indeed the whole of life, ought to be informed throughout by Christian faith. Yet it has been written, quite deliberately, without the use of the language of Christian faith. It seems appropriate, therefore, to explain this absence of Christian terminology in a work claiming to be informed by Christian faith and to indicate how that faith has informed the work as presented.

A dominant influence in my philosophical development has been undoubtedly the work of the Dutch Christian philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd, who, with his colleague, D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, gave a remarkable lead in developing a tradition of Christian philosophy in which my own work continues.

Of the many valuable insights that I have gained from the study of Dooyeweerd's work none is more valuable than the recognition of the importance of a religiously critical attitude; an attitude that, anchored in a firm religious commitment, subjects all things human to rigorous critical tests that probe to the deepest foundations of life. It is an attitude that, not content with the apparent or presumed soundness of ideas in their immediate presentation probes beneath the surface until the deepest foundations on which they rest are uncovered and critically evaluated.

This is an attitude that I have endeavoured to maintain throughout this work and that I hope others will adopt in reading it. It has inevitably lead me to bring Dooyeweerd's own theories under appreciative but critical scrutiny.

A further insight for which I am indebted to Dooyeweerd is the recognition that academic activity does not achieve a Christian character by the incorporation of Christian theological or confessional state-

ments - though such incorporation is, of course, not necessarily out of order. Scholarship achieves a Christian character only as the the Christian scholar pursues his scholarly activity, in accordance with the nature of his discipline, as a response in faith to the Word of God.

A first requirement of a work of Christian philosophy requires, then, that it be a philosophical work. Philosophy, as I understand it, is distinguished by the theoretical analysis of the coherence of reality in universal human experience. As such it legitimately includes in the scope of its analysis the confession and theological articulation of Christian faith. However its purpose in doing so is not to offer its own articulation of that confession but to offer an analysis of the place of Christian confession and theology within the coherence of reality.

The philosopher who is a Christian will, as a Christian, confess Christian faith within a Christian community in which that faith is articulated, both in confession and in theology. Within that community he will quite properly, as a philosopher, enter into critical interaction with Christian theology, stimulating the theologian to greater faithfulness in their common faith in theologising and being stimulated in turn to greater faithfulness in philosophising. In this interaction the philosopher may well point out to the theologian areas in which theology has been distorted by the influence of philosophical analysis informed by religious principles alien to the Christian faith, and receive reciprocal challenge with regard to his own philosophising from the theologian based on his special theological competence. So far as the philosopher may be also a theologian this interaction will take place also within his own thought.

But it is important that this kind of interaction between the philosopher and fellow members of the Christian community should not be

restricted to an interaction with theologians. In order to maximise the Christian character of his philosophising the philosopher needs to interact wherever possible, in direct relation to his philosophising, with all who share with him a common Christian faith in order that his philosophical work may be most effectively informed by the Word of God.

Yet in his philosophising, as I see it, it is not the task of the philosopher to give theoretical articulation to Christian faith as confession or as theology, but to offer an analysis of the coherence of reality that holds good not just for the Christian community but for all human experience. In this philosophical analysis, Christian community and Christian theology will take their place, as they should in any philosophy, as particular instances of confessional community and the theoretical articulation of religious confession respectively.

This is not at all to say that it is illegitimate for the Christian philosopher to incorporate explicit statements of Christian faith as statements of his faith in his philosophical writing. There are times when it will be important to do so and, indeed, it is precisely what I am doing in this appendix which I regard as an integral part of my philosophical work.

That I have reserved for an appendix these observations in which I make my Christian faith explicit is not because I regard them as lying outside my philosophical activity proper. In principle these comments might as well have been incorporated in the main text. I have chosen to write the main body of this work without the use of the terminology of Christian faith because it seems to me important for the Christian philosopher working in a secular context to communicate what I trust are ideas with a Christian character so far as possible in the language of the secular philosophical world. An important model for me in this respect is Paul's Areopagus speech as recorded in Acts 17:22-

31. While the content of this speech is profoundly Christian, the language that Paul used, so far as I can judge, is entirely devoid of terms or references peculiar to the Christian community but is the language of the pagan audience which he was addressing. It is in the interest of achieving a similar level of communication with today's secular philosophical world, and wholly for this reason, that I have avoided the use of language peculiar to the Christian community in the main body of this text.

However, this leaves the question of the Christian character of the philosophy. If a work is devoid of explicitly Christian content in what sense, if at all, can it be Christian? Must it not then be a natural philosophy founded in a natural reason that, at best, is compatible with Christian faith?

Such a conclusion, which has not been uncommon in the Christian tradition, assumes that philosophy, and other areas of theoretical activity, can only be informed by the Word of God by the incorporation of explicitly Christian content in its conceptual structure. This, it seems to me, rests on a fundamental misconception of the way in which the Word of God is related to human theoretical activity, and, indeed, to human life in general. It is absolutely crucial, in my view, to distinguish clearly between God and his Word, on the one hand, and the creation in and through which that Word comes to us, on the other hand. Any blurring of this distinction can only tend to either an idolatrous divinising of the creaturely, or a reduction of the divine to the creaturely.

With regard to the person of Christ it is a fundamental part of the universal confession of the Christian church that he is both fully divine and fully human without any confusion of the two. During his life on earth, then, anyone who met Jesus of Nazareth met the God the Son; the man Jesus and God the Son are inseparable. Yet any analysis

that might be made of this person Jesus could only have revealed human qualities such as might be found in any other man. Only the creaturely could be the object of human analysis; the divine, as that which in its nature is distinct from and transcends all creaturely categories, could not be brought within the scope of that analysis. To suppose it could would be to reduce the divine to the creaturely. The only response that men could make to God the Son, whom they met in meeting Jesus of Nazareth, was either that of submission in the obedience of faith or the rejection of unbelief.

It seems to me of the utmost importance that we maintain the same distinction with regard to the Word of God that comes to us in and through the creaturely text of Scripture. We may analyse, abstract from, and conceptualise the text of Scripture as we would any other creaturely text but we should not think that in doing so we are analysing, abstracting from, and conceptualising the Word of God. As the divine Word it is beyond all our creaturely categories and can only be responded to in the obedience of faith or the denial of unbelief.

This is not at all to say that it is not important to use every means at our disposal to arrive at the best possible understanding of the text of Scripture. It is of the greatest importance since it is in and through that text that the covenant-redemptive Word of our God comes to us. It is inseparable from though, like the person of God the Son in relation to Jesus of Nazareth, not to be confused with that text.

To wrestle with the problems in the understanding of Scripture in its relation to theoretical activity, as, for example, Spykman (1985) and Duvenage (1985) do, is a crucial component of Christian scholarly activity. However, when we begin to speak of the incorporation of the use of "Scriptural data" in science (Duvenage, 1985:22-24) we move into

territory where where we need to move with great care lest it be thought that a diligent use of Scripture, with attention to the right hermeneutics, yields some kind of divinely sanctioned data for incorporation in our knowledge.

All our analysis and scholarly attention to Scripture and the understanding of its text can only be concerned with the creaturely text as that in and through which God's Word comes to us. It does not give us possession of that Word as something to be incorporated in our knowledge in the form of data or concepts or principles or in any of the other creaturely categories of which knowledge is composed. The Word of God is not for us to take possession of and use but that which must take possession of us and direct our actions as we respond to the text of Scripture in faith.

There is in this respect, it seems to me, a danger in Dooyeweerd's identification of "creation, fall and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Ghost" as the religious ground-motive for Christian life and thought as the content of the "Divine Word-Revelation" (Dooyeweerd, 1953-8: Vol. I: 61, 173-177). It implies, or at least can be readily taken as implying, that the content of the Word of God can be encapsulated in a conceptual formula and so be incorporated as a component of our creaturely knowledge.

The Divine Word-Revelation that is the basic motive of the Christian religion is certainly rich in content to which Christians ought to respond in confessional statements and theological formulations, as well as in other ways. But it is important to keep clearly in view that such confessions and formulas are always of the nature of responses to the Divine Word-Revelation, and can never be in any way identified with, or an encapsulation of, the content of that Revelation. The full content of that Revelation can be nothing less than the person of God revealed in the concrete reality of his creative/redemptive acts,

a content too rich to be encapsulated in any conceptual formulation.

I am conscious that, in principle, this distinction was well recognised by Herman Dooyeweerd and has continued to receive recognition in the philosophical tradition with which his name is so closely associated and in which I work. I reiterate the principle here, however, and endeavour to sharpen it further because I fear that there is a real danger of failing to give it adequate recognition in practice.

The development of Christian philosophy with genuine reformational power, then, does not depend on the incorporation within it of concepts, principles or propositions that have the status of divine certainties or even of divine givens. Even were this to be attempted by incorporating texts of Scripture this would not be incorporating the Word of God in the philosophy; the Word of God comes to us only in Scripture in its integrity and not in passages which we extract to incorporate in another context. Philosophy can develop as Christian philosophy only as the philosopher philosophises with the conscious purpose of faith to listen for and respond with the submission of faith to the Word of God at every turn he takes in his philosophising. It is in this way that I have endeavoured to pursue my task in the present work and in that sense that I offer it as an endeavour in Christian philosophy.

It remains only to indicate some of the specific ways in which I believe that the philosophical analysis here presented has been informed by the inscripturated Word of God. For this purpose I offer the following outline of the basic contours of the distinctively Christian orientation within which this study has been conducted and through which, I believe, it has received a distinctively Christian shape.

The world of human existence is taken to be one world exhibiting the same fundamental structure, throughout all the diversity of human existence, as the creation held together and reconciled in God the Son

through whom and for whom it is created (Colossians 1:15-22). Among other things this is fundamental to the understanding of philosophy as the giving account of the coherence of a reality common to all mankind as discussed earlier in this appendix.

Secondly, this one world is lawfully structured not as a rational, or fiduciary, or organic, or physical lawfulness but by the lawfulness of the Word of God that, as the law for the creation, transcends and secures the lawfulness of every mode of creaturely functioning (Psalm 33; 119:89-91; 147; 148; Hebrews 1:1-3). This leads to the expectation of a lawful structuring in all our experience of reality the source of which cannot properly be located in a law either within the knowing subject or in the objects of that knowing.

It means that Popper's critical rationality, Piaget's organic rationality and Polanyi's fiduciary commitment must each be rejected as the central ordering principle of our knowing since each is but a mode of the lawfully structured functioning of reality under the lawful authority of the Word of God. It leads also to the rejection of the notion that a particular manner of knowing, such as the scientific, can be the key to knowledge since the key and unity of knowledge lies in the religious unity of life to which all the diversity of our knowing is subject.

In this respect it seems to me that the notion of the divine law for the creation as some kind of ontic category distinct from both God and creation is a mistake (Taljaard, 1976:42-47; Spykman, 1981:176-181; Hart, 1984:40-54). It assumes that God's lawful rule over the creation is mediated by laws that, though originating in him, are distinct from him, so that we must conceive of divine law as a category distinct from the personal presence of God if it is not to be confused with the creation.

But such a conception of law as mediate between God and his creation

is, I suggest, alien to the revelation of God through the Scriptures as the God ruling all things by his active, personal presence in the creation. He is a God distinct from the creation yet never distanced from it. The lawfulness that we experience in the structuring of creation is not secured by a set of laws distinct from God but by the faithful constancy of the authority of his rule achieved directly by his own active presence in the creation through his Word and Spirit. The law for the creation is the righteous authority of God's rule administered personally by the Son through the active presence of the Spirit.

What I have said about the person of Christ and about Scripture holds good in this respect also. God reveals himself to us in his lawful ordering of all creation but the ordering presence of God must always be kept distinct from the structure of creation in which he is revealed. It is partly for this reason I have insisted that, while we gain insight into the law for creation through our experience of its structure we cannot conceptualise the law but only our experiences of the structure to which that law gives effect. I believe this is crucial if we are not to risk losing the sharpness of the distinction between the divine and the creaturely. Thirdly, this study has been informed by the understanding that humans have an authority and a calling not merely to care for but also to subdue and cultivate the creation (Genesis 1:26-30; 2:15). If, on the one hand, we cannot shape our lives any way we will but only within lawful boundaries, on the other hand, human life is not fulfilled by conformity to a predetermined order but only by a creative ordering, a creative constructiveness, within the given lawful boundaries. This leads to the recognition that knowing is not to be restricted to a discovery or uncovering or even an unfolding of an order already built into the object world but includes a constructive activity of the subject, always within given

lawful boundaries.

This is by no means an exhaustive description of the distinctive orientation by which, with deliberate purpose, the philosophical analysis of this study has been informed. It touches only on the features that have had an immediate and explicit major significance for this study. It is an orientation that gains its distinctive character from a response of faith to the Christian Gospel proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures. This neither gives this study any special claim to truth nor invests it with any special authority nor exempts it from critical scrutiny both by fellow members of the Christian community and equally by fellow members of the philosophical community who do not share my Christian faith. It does give it, I believe, the distinctive quality of a Christian philosophical study.

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Explanatory Note: A number of works published under the name of Jean Piaget include research reports of a large number of colleagues who collaborated with the author in the research reported in the published work. Since these persons are listed by the publisher as collaborators rather than co-authors these works are listed under the name of Jean Piaget alone.

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