

## THE CHRISTIAN VOICE IN PHILOSOPHY

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### ABSTRACT

*In this paper the Rev. Stuart Fowler outlines a Christian voice in Philosophy and urges the Christian philosopher to investigate his position and his stance with integrity and honesty.*

*After an introduction dealing with the origins of the Christian tradition he proceeds to a discussion of Christian philosophy as such, and the importance of Philosophy. He states unequivocally that "Christianity is not a philosophy any more than it is a theology. It is a life-transforming faith, a religion, that, in principle, reshapes the whole life of man".*

*He critically evaluates the three broad approaches adopted by Christians in the field of Philosophy. These are the dependence on Theology to provide answers, the taking-over of another existing philosophy and altering it to fit the needs of Christian philosophy, and then the third approach, which is "to develop a distinctive philosophy that is firmly grounded in the gospel and takes its starting point unashamedly in the Word of God. Nothing less than this can be adequate for providing an authentic Christian voice amid the babel of modern philosophies".*

*After discussing the development of Christian thought in the twentieth century, he outlines the characteristics of a Christian philosophy, which would be Christian (grounded in the gospel); credible; modest; open; and practical.*

*In conclusion he urges the Christian philosopher to overcome the isolation that might be his lot in a secular world, "to recognize that this Christian philosophy can be... servant to help... see more clearly through the fog created by humanistic world views and philosophies the real nature of the issues that face us all in today's world". If this philosophy does not grow and develop, the loss will be the loss of the whole Christian community.*

Christianity was born at the crossroads of Jewish tradition and Greek wisdom. In the first century of its existence both these contemporary forces threatened to swallow it up by remaking it in their own image.

There is nothing unusual about this. In every age the established order of

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society attempts to meet the challenge of disturbing new ideas by absorbing them into its own system. In this way the established order neutralizes any threat by reshaping ideas to fit the existing system of thought. Incipient revolutionaries are not only contained but are turned into loyal supporters of the status quo.

### **THE APOSTOLIC FAITH**

The early leaders of Christianity, the Apostles, were alert to this danger and determined that Christianity would not be neutralized in this way. They were determined that it would survive as a living challenge to the established order both as represented by Jewish tradition and as represented by Greek wisdom.

So they called on the community of Christian disciples to avoid the contamination of “the world” and warned that any friendly alliance with this world was a demonstration of hostility to God — James 1:27; 4:4. In this they were simply being faithful to the teaching of the Lord who had told them himself that, as his disciples, they did not belong to “the world” — John 15:19.

More specifically, they insisted that the gospel is, for the Jew, a stumbling block, and, for the Greek, foolishness. In their view there is no way to reconcile the gospel with either Jewish or Greek wisdom — I Cor. 1:21-23.

• They continually did battle, on the one hand with the Judaizers who wanted to make Christianity respectable to orthodox Jews by absorbing it into Judaism, and, on the other hand, with those who wanted to make Christianity acceptable to the Greek world by assimilating it with Greek wisdom.

The Apostles made their own position very clear. Christianity cannot be assimilated to either Jewish tradition or Greek wisdom without denying itself. In order to maintain its integrity it must stand apart from every system of thought on which the established order is built. It must pronounce judgment on every way of thinking that is not grounded in the gospel and must be prepared to accept whatever contempt the thinkers of this world may heap on it for its refusal to conform to contemporary society’s accepted way of thinking.

At the same time, this standing apart must not be allowed to become an

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isolation from the world and its thought. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be *proclaimed to* the world. For this proclamation to be effective the Christian must go to the world to meet the world on its own ground. Christianity is concerned with the same issues of life and death that concern all men. There is no issue in human affairs in which the gospel is irrelevant or in which the Christian has no interest. The message of the gospel must be proclaimed to men of the world in terms of the issues that concern them and in a way that they will understand.

So we find the apostle Paul saying: "I make myself all things to all men so that, at all cost, I may save some". Among Greeks he shows an appreciation of Greek wisdom while among Jews he shows respect for the Jewish tradition — I Cor. 9:19-22, Acts 17:22-31; 21:20-26.

To be faithful to the gospel, therefore, the Apostles saw it as important to take their place *within* the culture, life, and thought of their age, while at the same time distinguishing themselves clearly from that culture, life, and thought, in that they could show the people of their age the better way of the gospel in the sharpest possible contrast to the established order of their age. They became men of their age, identifying themselves with the people of their age, in order to rescue men from this age.

### **APOSTOLIC FAITHFULNESS IN TODAY'S WORLD**

This position in relation to the life and thought of the world, defined so clearly by the Lord and his Apostles in the first century, must remain definite for the Christian in every age.

Yet the very nature of this Apostolic definition makes it impossible for us to use the Apostles' answer to the thought of their age as our answer to our age. The authentic Christian answer must be shaped afresh for each generation. The answers of yesterday will never do for today.

The gospel remains always the same news of God's redemption by Christ Jesus and Scripture remains always the same definitive word of God by the light of which we must check our answers. On these we must be unmoveable.

But the world to which we must speak this gospel is a changing world. The patterns of culture, life, and thought within which we must speak are everchanging patterns.

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To be faithful to the gospel we must proclaim it, not as a grand abstraction floating in the air, but as the Word that directs us to concrete answers to the existential questions that men are asking in a changing world. We must show how this gospel speaks to men of our age as the Apostles showed how it spoke to men of their age.

Grounded in this unchangeable gospel and guided by this unchangeable Word of God, we must meet the challenge of each succeeding generation by shaping anew answers that speak to the specific issues of that generation.

We, too, must position ourselves within the culture, life, and thought of our age while at the same time distinguishing ourselves sharply from that culture, life, and thought, so that we can show men of our age the better way of the gospel in answer to the questions of our age.

In this complex world of the second half of the twentieth century a bewildering array of questions press for our attention. It can be very tempting to become caught up with the immediate issues of living so that the foundational questions underlying these issues are never adequately examined.

Issues of pollution, of poverty, of pornography, of abortion, of the role of women, of uranium mining, and a host of others, are discussed and answers proposed without any serious examination of the foundational assumptions on which the discussions and answers are based.

If we are to be faithful in communicating the gospel to our age we must resist this temptation. Underlying every issue that presses on our attention there are foundational questions to which we must find appropriate answers before we can have any confidence that our discussion of the existential issues will be faithful to the gospel.

To speak with an authentic Christian voice to our age we must find the time and the resources, as a Christian community, to develop answers to the deepest questions of our age. We must not, we dare not, be content to deal *only* with the surface question to which all men clamour for answers.

One of the marks of our defection from the Apostolic definition of Christianity is that we are not regarded as a serious threat to the established order of our society. That established order has succeeded very well in containing us within its own categories. We do not threaten to break the old wine skins.

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It is futile for us to protest, that, unlike the Apostles, we live in a society founded on Christian principles. It is a delusion for us to pretend that our faithfulness to the gospel can be expressed by defending the Christian character of the established order of our society against the communists, liberals and radicals who threaten that order in one way or another.

Social conservatism never has been and never will be a mark of Apostolic faithfulness. It is the sign of a Church that has allowed an apostate world to contain and neutralize it within its own decaying structures.

This does not mean that we can recover faithfulness by taking to the streets in support of the latest popular movements of reform or by taking up the currently fashionable slogans of social criticism.

It means that we must recover the meaning of the gospel as a dynamic of lifetransforming dimensions. We must open ourselves, our ideas, our prejudices, our dogmas, our theories, our practices, to the dynamic of the gospel to be reshaped in the image of Christ.

We must take the Word of God as the only fixed point of reference for our thinking and acting. All else, as human works, including our most cherished ideal and principles, we must fearlessly leave open to change and reformation.

#### **HOW IMPORTANT IS PHILOSOPHY?**

It is in this context that we must consider the question of the Christian voice in philosophy. Such a voice will be empty and meaningless if it speaks alone. To be heard as an authentic Christian voice it must be heard in harmony with a comprehensive Christian witness that, speaking to our age with the authority of faith, challenges our age at every level of human affairs.

We cannot agree with Paul Tillich when he says: "Philosophy is its own final court of appeal. The first step in philosophy is the rejection of any possible court of appeal outside it. It is the most radical form of inquiry, which on principle assumes nothing beforehand. Philosophy assumes nothing outside itself" (*Twentieth Century Theology in the Making*, ed. J. Palikan: Fontana 1970, p. 246).

We must insist that Christ is Lord of all human works including philosophy. Philosophy, along with every other human work, must be subject to the

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judgment of his Word. It must assume, as its starting point, the truth of that Word. To be faithful to the Apostolic definition of Christianity the wisdom of all modern philosophies that are not grounded in the gospel, like the wisdom of ancient Greece, must be judged folly.

But it is not enough to judge modern philosophies. These philosophies are concerned with real issues of human existence. They are wrestling with basic questions affecting our daily living. It is not enough to write them off as folly. If we expect our Christian witness to be taken seriously we must offer a serious *philosophical* alternative to the philosophies of our age; we must give credible *philosophical* answers that are grounded in the gospel.

Philosophical answers are not the only kind of answers we need to give to our age. Christianity is not a philosophy any more than it is a theology. It is a life-transforming faith, a religion, that, in principle, reshapes the whole life of man.

But, just because Christianity is life-encompassing, any complete Christian witness to our age must *include* a Christian voice in philosophy. We must not leave the field of philosophy to others.

Furthermore, in this age where learning and science play such a significant role, there is a special urgency about this task of giving a Christian answer in philosophy. It is in the world of science and learning that philosophy has its most immediate influence. Every scientist and scholar operates explicitly, or, more often, implicitly, with a philosophical developed understanding of the nature, scope, and possibilities of his discipline and of the relation of his discipline to other disciplines and to the non-theoretical areas of life.

Even when any such philosophical influence is denied by the scientist a little critical analysis will soon reveal its presence.

Take the scientist who protests: "I assume nothing at all about these philosophical questions in my work as a scientist. My task is simply to investigate and collate the facts. I make no assumptions but simply let the facts speak for themselves."

This sort of statement reveals, in itself, a certain understanding of the nature, scope, and possibilities of the scientific discipline that has clearly been shaped by positivistic philosophies. This scientist is operating on the assumption that facts can be collected like shells on the seashore, arranged in

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some self-evident way, and, when so gathered and arranged, will give the answers we need, or, at least, all the answers we can expect.

Theology is no exception. A theologian like H.M. Kuitert may insist that theology is safe only when it foreswears all connection with "a specific philosophy". He may even quote no lesser a figure than Herman Bavinck in support of this view. He may criticize earlier Reformed theologians for their alliance with Aristotelian philosophy (see his *The Reality of Faith*, Eerdmans, 1868, p. 25f). Yet his own theology can be appreciated only when we recognize that he operates with an understanding of the cosmos that bears the unmistakable marks of the historicist philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey.

This is the danger that will always threaten the theologian who tries to disassociate himself from "a specific philosophy". He will be in constant peril of falling under the influence of a philosophy that is alien to the gospel *without even being aware of that influence*.

Because of this powerful influence that philosophy has on all academic disciplines, in an age like ours where science plays such a large role in human affairs, there is a special urgency about developing the Christian voice in philosophy. To ignore philosophy or to dismiss it as of little practical importance would be a fatal blunder.

#### EXAMINING THE OPTIONS

In attempting to develop a Christian voice in philosophy Christians have adopted three broad approaches.

One approach is to rely on theology to give the Christian answers to philosophy. There are three serious objections to this approach.

The first objection is that since theology is not philosophy it cannot give instinctively philosophical answers. It leaves philosophy without a distinctive Christian voice, relying on a theological Christian voice to speak to the philosopher from outside philosophy.

The second objection is that this approach fails to expose philosophy to the judgment of the Word of God. There is no immediate exposure of philosophy to the Word of God but only to the word of man as expressed in Christian theology.

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The third, and possibly most decisive, objection is that since, as we have just noticed, theology itself is subject to the influence of philosophy it cannot be relied on for the genuinely critical attitude which is essential for developing an authentic Christian voice in philosophy. Every theology is developed under the influence of one philosopher or another. It cannot, therefore, be an effective tool for a critical analysis of philosophy since it has assumed the truth of that particular philosophy under whose influence it has been developed. Every theology is unfitted to be the Christian voice in philosophy just because every theology is, in the nature of things, philosophically biased.

These objections are so powerful that they lead us to a decisive rejection of the ideal that theology can ever be the Christian voice in philosophy.

A second approach attempts to develop a Christian voice in philosophy by taking over one or another of the philosophies already being offered in the philosophical market-place and modifying it in the light of the Christian faith. This has the advantage that it saves the Christian philosopher from the daunting task of building a complete new philosophy. He can simply adopt the work of others and modify it to suit his particular Christian purpose. This is not to suggest that this is in any way to be regarded as a "lazy option". It does offer the possibility of "Christian" answers more quickly over a much wider range of issues than would be the case if we had to build a Christian philosophy from the beginning.

Yet, in spite of this major attraction, this approach is open to serious objection. It cannot produce a philosophy that is *grounded in* the gospel. It can only *modify* by the gospel a philosophy that is *grounded in* a different religious principle. Since any authentic Christian voice in harmony with the Apostolic definition of Christianity must be *grounded in* the gospel, and fundamentally distinguished from the wisdom of this world, we must also reject this approach, even though we acknowledge that it is adopted by some very earnest Christians working in the field of philosophy.

This leaves us with only the third approach. This is to develop a distinctive philosophy that is firmly *grounded in* the gospel and *takes its starting point* unashamedly in the Word of God. Nothing less than this can be adequate for providing an authentic Christian voice amid the babel of modern philosophies.



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### CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the goodness of God we are not left to develop such a philosophy from scratch. Important groundwork of massive proportions has already been done on just such a philosophy by Profs. D.H.T. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd of the Netherlands, followed by others, preeminently in the Netherlands, but also in South Africa and, to a much lesser extent, in North America.

It would be outrageous to attempt even an outline of the content of this philosophy here. Those who want the simplest possible introduction to its content should do nothing less than read the two hundred and ninety-five pages of *The Contours of a Christian Philosophy* by L. Kalsbeek (published by Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1975). Anything less than this would be absurd and, if you regard yourself as anything of a philosopher you should immediately proceed from Kalsbeek to a careful reading of the nineteen hundred and forty-eight pages of H. Dooyeweerd's *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*.

What we can do here is outline some of the characteristics of this philosophy that make it worthy of attention and respect.

Before doing this, however, we should take a quick look at the history of this philosophy.

Philosophies do not develop in ivory tower isolation. They arrive only within the context of larger life-shaping religious movements. They give theoretical expression to the world and life views of living communities of people. A philosophy can never be the driving force for human activity. It is always a product of and a reinforcement for a religious driving force that is also shaping human life in other ways.

Anyone who tries to produce a philosophy in isolation can only produce a philosophical abortion. Only where a fresh religious driving force is pushing human life out in new directions will a new philosophy be developed under the impetus of this religious driving force.

While it is true that the philosophy will serve to reinforce the religious movement out of which it has grown it can never become the driving force for living but will always be itself driven by a religious motive. If that religious motive dies then the philosophy must die.

In the second half of the last century a powerful new religious movement

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swept the Netherlands. Although the name of Abraham Kuyper has become inseparably associated with that movement, it would be a grave mistake to see it as a Kuyper movement. It was much too big for that.

In this movement the Christian faith broke out of the confines of church and theological seminary to invade the every day life of the nation. The ferment was certainly felt in ecclesiastical circles but it could not be confined there. The dynamic of the gospel was felt throughout the life of the nation. Christian faith was expressed, not only in theological and ecclesiastical terms, but also in political, educational, and social terms. Throughout the breadth and length of human affairs the gods of this age were challenged.

This was not a philosophical movement. If it had been it could not have had such powerful affect. Indeed, it was so far from being a philosophical movement that the Free University of Amsterdam, which grew out of the movement, was founded without any department of philosophy, and continued for forty-six years before the appointment of the first full-time professor of Philosophy.

Yet, a religious movement of such breadth and power could hardly fail to bear fruit in philosophy also. The genius of this movement was the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord in all human affairs. It is not surprising that, in time, this bore fruit in attempt to develop a philosophy that takes this confession seriously.

It is impossible to understand this philosophy except as one of the later maturing fruits of the movement of religious renewal that swept the Netherlands in the second half of the last century.

As such it bears the marks of its origins, both in the Dutch movement of Christian renewal, and also in the wider context of continental European thought. It would be foolish to pretend that it bears no distinctive marks of continental Europe in general and of the Netherlands in particular.

For this reason it would be a serious mistake to suppose that it will provide a ready-made answer to the philosophical needs of the Christian community in the quite different context of Australia and New Zealand.

At the same time, because of its roots in a religious movement of *Christian* renewal, the potential usefulness of this philosophy transcends the limitations of its specific cultural context, just as the Christian faith, as a religious

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principle, transcends all cultural barriers. All who share the religious driving force of the Netherlands' renewal, with its life-encompassing vision of Christ's lordship, will find in this philosophy an indispensable tool, an invaluable starting point, for the development of the Christian voice in philosophy within their own cultural context.

It is worth noting that, in general, in Australia and New Zealand, the greatest appreciation of this philosophy is being shown by Christian thinkers who do not share either the Dutch, or more generally, the continental European, cultural heritage. This, in itself, testifies that the usefulness of this philosophy transcends its distinctive Dutch origins.

Indeed, it is sad to observe that, in some cases at least, Australians and New Zealanders who do have a Dutch cultural heritage tend to discard this philosophy as just so much Dutch baggage that must be got rid of in order to prove that they are now really Australians or New Zealanders. If they persist in doing this they will be despising a rich gift that God has given them to share with the world. Where will they then look for the development of an authentic Christian voice in philosophy?

There are five characteristics of this philosophy that should commend it to the attention of all Christian scholars and the respect of all Christians. It is Christian, credible, modest, open, and practical. For those who have had only superficial contact with this philosophy, either directly or through one or another of its more popular apologists or critics, some of these terms may seem scarcely appropriate. Let us consider each of them in turn more closely.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY**

1. This philosophy is a *Christian* philosophy. It is Christian in a quite unique sense among philosophies in that it deliberately sets out to ground its entire philosophical structure in the Word of God given in the Scriptures.

It does not attempt to isolate itself from other modern philosophies. On the contrary, it deliberately looks for contact with those philosophies. Yet it quite clearly and explicitly builds its own thought on different foundations. It is not a philosophy *modified by* the gospel but one that is *grounded in* the gospel. It unashamedly takes as the starting point of its thought the content of the biblical revelation, the Word of God written in the Scriptures.

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Although it developed out of one section of the Church represented by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, it is not the peculiar property of that section of the church but belongs to all Christians.

It can claim this universal Christian character because, while all it says is fully *consistent with the confession* of that section of the church in which it was born, it is *not grounded in dogmas or theologies* that are peculiar to that part of the church. It is not grounded in dogmas or theologies of any sort at all but is grounded immediately in the Word of God as given in the Scriptures. This is the basis of its claim to be regarded as a distinctively Christian philosophy.

2. It is a *credible* philosophy. It can stand with head high among the philosophies of the world as a philosophy developed with genuine scholarly integrity. While its Christian character means that it cannot hope to win acceptance among unbelieving scholars, the breadth and depth of its penetration command respect in the world of scholarship.

On the occasion of Dooyeweerd's seventieth birthday the Dutch Christian Daily "Trouw" (Oct. 6, 1964) published an evaluation of his contribution to philosophy written by a scholar who did not share his Christian convictions. This scholar was G.D. Langemeijer, professor of Legal Philosophy at the University of Leiden until 1957 when he took up an appointment as prosecutor general with the Dutch supreme court. Before his retirement in 1973 Langemeijer served for several years as president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science and Letters, some indication of his standing in the academic world.

In his evaluation Langemeijer said: "Without any exaggeration Dooyeweerd can be called the most original philosopher Holland has ever produced, even Spinoza not excepted." He went on to say that it would be exceedingly fruitful for other philosophies who do not share Dooyeweerd's religious convictions to enter into discussions with him. He indicated that such discussions could only enrich these other philosophies and make them think more sharply about their own position. He expressed the opinion that this philosophy, more than is usually the case, opens the way to a fruitful exchange of thought with scholars of a different persuasion.

Perhaps this very originality together with the breadth and depth of penetration prevents many from appreciating the value of this philosophy. Because it is a serious philosophical work of unusual breadth and depth and showing considerable originality it requires unusual effort and diligence to

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come to grips with it. It will not yield the riches of its thought to the casual student who is not ready for sustained, persistent mental effort of a kind that is not commonly required even of tertiary students in our society.

It is understandable, therefore, that many prefer to rely for their knowledge of this philosophy on secondhand impressions or popularizations rather than having to make the effort required for a serious study of the basic philosophical texts. This may well do for the person who makes no scholarly pretensions but will hardly do for any Christian who makes claim to being regarded as a scholar.

And it is entirely indefensible for Christian theologians who have not made a thorough study of the major philosophical works involved to condemn this philosophy or to dismiss it as unworthy of attention. Such an attitude shows a complete lack of the integrity that should always mark the work of the Christian scholar.

Nothing could be more absurd than the attempt to discredit this philosophy by labelling it "a second-rate philosophical system" marked by "general intellectual shoddiness". Yet, when such statements are made by a Christian theologian many people, not equipped to make their own assessment, will accept such statements as valid on the basis of the theologian's scholarly reputation. In the circumstances the making of statements of this kind can only be described as irresponsible.

A similar lack of integrity is shown when critiques of this philosophy are written that depend heavily on non-philosophical works written by persons, not philosophers, who express some kind of sympathy with this philosophy. Scholarly integrity, not to say Christian integrity, demands that a philosophy be judged by its definitive text and not by non-philosophical works deemed to have some kind of association with it.

Where this philosophy, as a serious philosophy, has confronted the world of contemporary philosophy it has won the respect, if not approval, of philosophers of this age. This has been the experience in Australia and New Zealand as well as other parts of the world. It does little credit to the Christian theologian concerned, therefore, when the attempt is made to discredit it as "second-rate philosophy"

It is not only entirely permissible but highly desirable that this philosophy be exposed to the sharpest possible critical examination by other scholars,

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including Christian theologians. What is not legitimate is the substitution of rhetorical denigration or summary for genuine scholarly criticism.

3. This philosophy is also *modest*. It makes no claim for acceptance as a controlling force in human life. It entirely denies that philosophy is ever able to be such a motivating force. It asks for allegiance from no one. It makes no bid for recognition as the guiding light of Christian thought and action.

It repudiates the idea that allegiance to a particular philosophy should be made the test of Christian fellowship or faithfulness.

It claims only to be the work of believing men in the important, but limited, field of philosophy; men who are attempting, under the direction of God's Word written in scripture, to give a theoretical account of the unity and diversity that we encounter in our experience of the world. Within this limited field it asks for a respectful hearing, but it asks no one to accept anything it says on the bare authority of a Christian philosophy.

It claims to serve all men both by alerting them to the intrusion into the thought of the Christian community of philosophies alien to the gospel and by providing a viable philosophical alternative that is grounded in the gospel. It asks no one for an implicit or uncritical acceptance of either its warnings or its alternative.

It makes no pretentious claims to authority over human thought. Any authority it claims is strictly limited to philosophical issues and, even there, it claims only the fallible, always defective, authority that belongs in any field of human affairs to sinful, but redeemed, men who consciously endeavour to ground their work in the gospel.

It is true that this philosophy refuses to accept that its claim to be a Christian philosophy should be subjected to the judgment of theology. It repudiates any claim by theology to be honoured as queen of the sciences and guardian and guide of all Christian thought.

But it does not thereby ask that philosophy be enthroned as the new guardian and guide of Christian thought. It insists that science, and human thought, in all its branches, can have no queen but only a King in the person of Jesus Christ.

It asks only for genuine partnership with other branches of Christian

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thought. Of theology it asks only that, as a human work, theology should abandon all claim to superior authority over other human works and take its place as an equal partner alongside the other branches of Christian thought, including Christian philosophy.

On this basis, when Christian philosophy operating in its legitimate philosophical field of inquiry, says things that challenge accepted theological positions it asks only that theology give it the respect due to it as a genuine partner in Christ: that it be not presumed to be in the wrong because it does not agree with accepted theological positions but that theologian and philosopher talk together as Christian brethren, each with his own gifts and competence, who take seriously their common confession that neither theology nor philosophy but only the Word of God can be the definitive authority for human thought.

4. This philosophy is an *open* philosophy. It is not a closed system. It is not a set of philosophical dogmas to which all the orthodox must subscribe or be proscribed as heretics.

The two men who must be regarded as the fathers of this philosophy, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd did not agree on all important points, and among those who have followed in their steps there have been and remain significant differences.

In this respect it is misleading to speak of a person who is working within this Christian philosophy as a Dooyeweerdian. Very few could be properly called Dooyeweerdians if this mean total acceptance of Dooyeweerd's philosophical formulations, though all would respect the monumental work that he and Vollenhoven have done and would acknowledge their great indebtedness to these men for their indispensable foundational work.

But this is a truly open, developing philosophy where inquiry and questioning are encouraged. It is characteristic of this philosophy to insist that all human thought, including this philosophy, must be regarded as provisional. And, as Christian philosophy, all who work with this philosophy are bound to check it constantly for its faithfulness to the Word of God and its accuracy in giving an account of the encounter with the creation which we experience.

5. This philosophy is also a *practical* philosophy. As a philosophy it has a theoretical character but it makes no break between theory and practice. It

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is not a speculative system that tries to fit all experience into a pre-determined framework but is an attempt to give a theoretical account, in the light of the Word of God, of the daily encounter that man has with the creation. It is one way in which we can deepen our understanding of that creation.

The data with which it works are always the data of experience. It is continually testing its formulations by further encounter with the creation. Guided by the Word of God that tells us that the world to which we belong is a created world, this philosophy can proceed with confidence in the reality of this world and the reliability of our encounter with this world as the source of our knowledge of it when guided by the Word of God by which it is ordered.

It is this empirical character that makes this philosophy such a useful aid for the modern scientist by helping to give him a clearer view of his field of investigation. It must be stressed that this philosophy in no way takes over the work of the special sciences nor does it act as any kind of guide for them in their work. What it does is give a clearer view of the field of investigation for the special sciences.

The empirical character of this philosophy means also that it is invaluable in the search for answers to the many and complex concrete issues of living in today's world. Again it will not *give* ready-made answers nor should it be looked to as any sort of guide in searching for answers. The Word of God alone must be our guide. What this philosophy can be expected to do is to help us to get a clearer view of the real problem by isolating that problem from the fog of false problems.

### **OVERCOMING THE ISOLATION**

Not only is there a Christian voice already present in philosophy, therefore, but it is a voice that deserves the respect and attention of all Christians. Not only is it a voice that speaks in the name of the gospel to the world of philosophy, but it is a voice that is well fitted to serve the whole Christian community in the struggle for a more authentic way of living in harmony with the gospel in today's complex world.

This does not mean that every Christian should attempt to become a philosopher or even to undertake the study of this Christian philosophy. That would be a fatal denial of the diversity of the body of Christ.



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Philosophy is not any sort of magic key to the world's, or to Christian's, problems. Different responses to this philosophy will be appropriate for different groups of people.

Any Christian who takes up philosophy as his or her field of study has a clear responsibility to make a careful and close study of this philosophy. It is simply irresponsible for a Christian in this position not to do so.

If, after careful examination, such a person should conclude that this philosophy is totally unserviceable as a Christian voice in philosophy, then there is the further responsibility to demonstrate clearly why this is so and further to offer *an alternative philosophy that is grounded in the gospel*.

Christian scholars and scientists working in fields other than philosophy, including theologians, have a clear responsibility to enter into continuing dialogue with this Christian philosophy. Such dialogue is needed both so that this philosophy can be further enriched and corrected where necessary by the insights of other disciplines, and so that the other disciplines can enjoy the benefit of the clearer view of their field of study that this philosophy can supply.

It is not to be expected that all scholars and scientists should be philosophers. What can be expected among Christian scholars and scientists is that there will be genuine dialogue in which philosophy listens with openness and respect to the other disciplines and the other disciplines, including theology, listen with similar openness and respect to philosophy.

So far as Christians in general are concerned they need to be encouraged to recognize that this Christian philosophy can be their servant to help them to see more clearly through the fog created by humanistic world views and philosophies the real nature of the issues that face us all in today's world.

For those who continue to work at the development of this Christian philosophical voice there are also responsibilities to their fellow Christians. They are responsible to do all in their power to open the way for genuine dialogue; to clarify features of this philosophy that cause concern among their fellow Christians; to exhibit in their personal attitudes the humility and openness that are characteristic of the philosophy they represent; and to pursue their work with keen awareness of the importance of relating that work clearly to the central issues of Christians in today's world.

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In short, as this philosophy of which we have spoken arose not in some philosophical ivory tower but out of a living Christian community, so it can only grow and develop within such a community, and, if it does not grow and develop, the loss will be the loss of the whole Christian community.