

DUTCH NEO-CALVINISM AND THE ROOTS FOR TRANSFORMATION: AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his famous lectures delivered at the Yale University School of Law in 1931, Carl Becker maintained that the prominent thinkers in the Enlightenment (e.g. Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau) attempted to demolish the heavenly city of St. Augustine only to rebuilt it with modern materials.² In my judgment, Becker's thesis correctly contrasted the eschatological approach to life found in medieval Christian Europe and the eschatological approach to life found in the French philosophes. For the common believer in medieval Europe, this world is not one's home; rather, the believer looks forward to final perfectibility in Christ in the next world. In contrast, the philosophes of the Enlightenment advanced their own doctrine of progress and perfectibility of humanity through a radical regeneration of morality and social institutions.³ For the philosophes the quest for modernity was to transform the Biblical notion of the Garden of Eden and the eternal heavenly city into an earthly egalitarian society and cultural utopia.⁴ In their estimation, the *future* (posterity) would rationally and naturally bring this transformation. For this reason, "posterity" was often reverently addressed by the philosophes as a divinity as well as an object of prayer.⁵ Indeed, the quest for modernity will be realized; the dominance of the medieval Christian world will be uprooted and transformed into the world of fraternity, liberty, and equality. For them, the process towards modernity had begun: the sun, not the earth, is the center of the universe (Copernican revolution), nature is controlled by

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¹ This essay was presented to the faculty of Covenant College in a faculty lecture series that addressed the issue: "what does it mean to be Kuyperian." The lecture was to present a brief historical sketch and an analysis of Dutch neo-Calvinism.

² *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale, 1932) 31.

³ See *ibid.* 139.

⁴ Matri Calinescu writes: "directly linked to the decline of traditional Christianity's role is the powerful emergence of utopianism, perhaps the single most important event in the modern intellectual history of the West" (*Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* [Durham: Duke, 1987] 63).

⁵ See Becker, *Heavenly City* 142. For example, on one occasion, Robespierre finished an invocation by saying, "Make haste, O Posterity, to bring to pass the hour of equality, of justice, of happiness!" (*ibid.* 143; cf. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Science of Freedom* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1977] 90–91).

its own inherent power (Newton following Lucretius), exploration focused human attention on this world and not the next world, the expulsion of original sin made the perfectibility of humanity a realized possibility, war can possibly cease by getting rid of religious sects or Christian Protestant denominations—creating an air of tolerance never experienced by humanity (Lord Herbert of Cherbury's proposal)—and hence, the new rational humanism has created the best of all possible worlds here on earth.⁶

As the Enlightenment fathers called for reconstruction of all social institutions on the basis of their vision of posterity, they left Christianity's foothold upon the European landscape in a defensive posture. The prominence of Christianity was now being attacked by enlightened modernity. In order to maintain a place of prominence, Christians throughout Europe accepted the challenge to defend themselves by attempting to reconstruct European culture and society upon Christian principles. In this battle for western culture, many Christians realized that they could not return to the feudal society of the *ancien regime*. Rather, in the context of the transition from mercantilism to capitalism, the rising tide of democratic ideals, the burst of industrialization, and the increasing benefits of a global market economy, many Christians adapted to the progressive tide of modernization in this world while minimizing any quest for reward in the next world.⁷ Herein, they began to stress the presence of the kingdom of God in the present age. Increasingly, the Christian conception of the eschatological future moved into the present world, not solely on the basis of exegetical and theological reasons, but for social-political-economic reasons.

Specifically, as Christianity accepted the challenge of enlightened secularism, many Christians tried to reclaim European culture by attempting to place their own eschatological socio-cultural theory upon the blueprint of the modern city. These Christians called for transforming the modern city into Zion by rediscovering, implementing and following the norms of the creation order. Hence, Becker's thesis advances one step: if the philosophes rebuilt St. Augustine's heavenly city with modern materials, then many Christians responded by attempting to rebuild the modern city with Christian materials. In this context, however, the Enlightenment had designed the foundational structures of the eschatological city. Even Christianity would relinquish her desire for the next world in order to claim the posterity of this world from the heathen. For many Christians, the new heaven and earth will take place in this world; the celestial city of Post-Enlightenment Christianity will exist

⁶ For these reasons, Peter Gay refers to the philosophes as "modern pagans" (ibid. 125).

⁷ A famous quote from Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* illustrates my point: "Enter the London Stock Exchange, that place more respectable than many a court. You will see the deputies of all nations gathered there for the service of mankind. There the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Christian deal with each other as if they were of the same religion, and give the name of infidel only to those who go bankrupt; there, the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Anglican honors the Quaker's promise. On leaving these peaceful and free assemblies, some go to the synagogue, others to drink; this one goes to be baptized . . . ; that one has his foreskin cut off and the Hebrew words mumbled over the child which he does not understand; others go to their church to await the inspiration of God, their hats on their heads, and all are content" (Gay, *Enlightenment* 50).

in continuity with the present earth. Increasingly, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both the legacy of the Enlightenment and the heritage of Christianity desired the thrill of possessing the culture—this world as we see it! Dutch neo-Calvinism has participated in this cultural battle, but it seems to me that the underpinnings of the eschatological vision of the Enlightenment have increasingly encompassed the eschatological vision of neo-Calvinism.

II. NINETEENTH-CENTURY DUTCH NEO-CALVINISM

The Dutch neo-Calvinist movement established its identity as a revival of historic Calvinism in an attempt to counter the social, cultural and religious effects of enlightened Europe. The movement was chiefly associated with the name of Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). The term, neo-Calvinism, was originally coined, however, by Kuyper's opponents but was accepted by him and his followers, who viewed themselves as developing classical Calvinism in the culture surrounding them.⁸ In the nineteenth century the neo-Calvinist movement posited its reformational principles over against Roman Catholic thought and modern secular thought, and it was characterized chiefly by its all-embracing worldview, shaped by the light of Scripture.⁹ Perhaps the key player at the initial stage of this movement was the historian and statesman, Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer (1801–1876), who in his lectures *Unbelief and Revolution* (1847) maintained that the intellectual revolution of the Enlightenment had subverted the spiritual foundation of European society.¹⁰ In his estimation, the Enlightenment had attacked the Christian foundations of European civilization with a new view of liberty which would reconstruct everything upon a new foundation of autonomous and individual rationality, including religion, morality, state and culture. Perhaps more importantly, the Enlightenment not only attacked the Christian foundations of European culture, but it also attacked the foundation of the entire scope of human history since Groen held that "Christianity is the source of all religious enlightenment."¹¹

⁸ See Albert Wolters, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan van der Hoeven, Nicholas Wolterstorff; Lanham: University Press of America, 1983) 117.

⁹ See Herman Dooyeweerd, "Introduction by the Editor in Chief, Prof. Herman Dooyeweerd," *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy: Essays in Honour of D. H. Th. Vollenhoeven* (ed. K. A. Bril, H. Hart and J. Klapwijk; Toronto: Wedge, 1973) 7.

¹⁰ See Harry Van Dyke, *Groen Van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station: Wedge, 1989) 3. Michael P. Fogarty refers to Groen as "the father of the modern Dutch Protestant political and social movement" (*Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820–1953* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957] 159). Joris van Eijnatten states that Groen guided traditional Calvinism "into the very midst and centre of Dutch culture" during the nineteenth century (*God, Nederland en Oranje: Dutch Calvinism and the Search for the Social Centre* [Kampen: Kok, 1993] 260).

¹¹ See J. Klapwijk, "Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy," in *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy* 50–51.

For Groen, the Judaeo-Christian foundation of European culture and human history was at stake. Van Dyke correctly analyzes Groen's concern:

Revolutions are here to stay and will grow much worse in scope and intensity unless men can be persuaded to return to Christianity, to practice its precepts and to obey the Gospel in its full implications for human life and civilized society. Barring such a revival, the future would belong to socialism and communism, which on this view were but the most consistent sects of the new secular religion.¹²

Hence, Van Dyke points out that Groen's *Unbelief and Revolution* ends with a compelling invitation; Christians throughout Europe are to resist the secular revolution and to work for a radical alternative in politics along anti-revolutionary and Christian-historical lines.¹³ Simply, Groen wanted to transform, restore and reconstruct Europe into a holistic Christian culture. Specifically, an effective Christian counter-revolution called for the construction of the kingdom of God on earth (a Christian utopia).¹⁴

Groen's view to reclaim Holland and Europe was based upon his philosophy of history.¹⁵ Particularly, experience (nature) and the historical revelation of the Word of God present the facts by which one accounts for historical knowledge. In my judgment, herein lies a difficult dilemma in Groen's historiography. He attacked the autonomous use of reason, nature and experience in the Enlightenment figures that propagated atheism, whereas he applauded classical figures (e.g. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero) as well as modern figures (e.g. Descartes, Bacon and Leibniz) who submitted reason, nature and experience to theism.¹⁶ By means of this methodological procedure, Groen depended upon the experience of classical and pre-Enlightenment theists to unfold the truth of cultural and societal institutions without uncovering their presuppositions of reason, nature and experience. Since Groen did not apply a consistent presuppositional critique to his declared allies, his restorationist's view of European culture followed the horizontal structure of the Enlightenment atheists he wished to condemn. In fact, Plato played such an influential role in Groen's thought that he could not address his present situation in Holland without Plato's theocracy. For Groen:

The Platonic theocracy was the union of Church and State; the Greek city or state was the Dutch Reformed Church; the eternal ideas, the infallible Word of God, and the light of Philosophy, the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*; the *Laws* was the Confession of Faith; the Platonic regulations, ecclesiastical discipline; while Plato's elders, training the young in measured dance and song, were the Dutch clergy instructing them in the Heidelberg Catechism.¹⁷

¹² *Unbelief and Revolution* 3.

¹³ *Ibid.* 4.

¹⁴ See *ibid.* Lecture XV, sections 422–423.

¹⁵ Groen wrote: "History alone will be our instructor. To be taught by history is good for everyone, at any time" (*ibid.* Lecture I, section 17).

¹⁶ See *ibid.* Lecture II, sections 25–29.

¹⁷ This statement is found in J. H. MacKay's *Religious Thought in Holland During the Nineteenth Century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911) 29. MacKay's statement is a summary of Allard Pierson's description of how Groen viewed Holland. This quote appears in William Young's *Toward A Reformed Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein, 1952) 41.

On this basis, it seems that Groen attempted to counter the Enlightenment construction of eschatology with a Platonic, horizontal structure of civil religion which was grounded upon a romantic-historical philosophy of religion.¹⁸ Even so, as one reads the concluding lecture of his *Unbelief and Revolution*, Groen does not map out the particular characteristics of the final kingdom; rather, he called Christians immediately to implement Christian constitutional law in Holland and the rest of Europe.¹⁹ In other words, a Christian eschatological utopia is meaningless without first implementing Christian constitutional laws into the socio-political fabric of life.²⁰

Abraham Kuyper carried on the anti-revolutionary movement;²¹ it was Kuyper who turned the anti-revolutionary movement into the most well-organized political party in Holland by the turn of the century.²² Like Groen, Kuyper viewed the French Enlightenment and its Revolution as destructive to the Christian foundation of western civilization. In fact, Kuyper likened the French Enlightenment and its Revolution to Israel's Babylonian captivity. Just as God used the pagan nation of Babylon to bring corrupt Israel back to God's ordinances, likewise, God used the French Enlightenment and its quest for "individual" rights as judgment upon the corrupt authority and power ("Statecraft") of the European nations who had treated human nature and society violently.²³ Although Kuyper believed that God used the autonomy of individual rights as a means to collapse the *ancien regime*, nevertheless, such autonomy was also an enemy of Christianity since it asserted its individuality against Christian dogma and truth. Even so, Kuyper did not find everything in the revolutionary French Enlightenment as an enemy of Christianity. Rather, he applauded the French philosophes for giving birth to a "social-democratic movement" of "equality and fraternity."²⁴

¹⁸ See Klapwijk, "Calvin and Neo-Calvinism" 50.

¹⁹ Van Dyke, *Unbelief and Revolution*, Lecture XV, section 423.

²⁰ Throughout this essay, "civil religion" should be understood as the attempt to promote and incorporate a Christian ethos as the predominant worldview in a given pluralistic culture and society. For further analysis of Groen's agenda, one should consult van Eijnatten's *God, Nederland en Oranje*, 258–267 (cf. McKendree R. Langley, *Emancipation and Apologetics: The Formation of Abraham Kuyper's Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands, 1872–1880* [Ann Arbor: UMI Microfilm, 1995] 39–55).

²¹ Dirk Jellema states that "Kuyper had read Groen's works, and been impressed with their outlook. In 1869 the aging Groen met with the young minister [Kuyper], and Kuyper became associated with the Antirevolutionaries" ("Abraham Kuyper's Attack on Liberalism," *Review of Politics* 19 [1957] 474).

²² The Anti-Revolutionary Party was born in 1871 and became the first national political party in the Netherlands on April 3, 1879. Prior to 1879, the Netherlands did not have formal parties, rather there existed political alliances which were known as "groups" (see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Abraham Kuyper and the Rise of Neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands," *Church History* 17 [1948] 321; McKendree R. Langley, *The Practice of Political Spirituality: Episodes From the Public Career of Abraham Kuyper, 1879–1918* [Jordan Station: Paideia, 1984] 9–29; Langley, *Emancipation and Apologetics* 92–160; and Gerald Newton, *The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey 1795–1977* [London: Ernest Benn, 1978] 63).

²³ See Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty* (ed. James W. Skillen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 43, 85 n.5. This volume is a translation of the opening address at the First Christian Social Congress in the Netherlands, November 9, 1891.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 47, 48.

In Kuypers estimation, however, a problem arose in nineteenth century Europe when the principles of "equality and fraternity" were based upon irreligious and autonomous (liberal) presuppositions, instead of the authority and sovereignty of God. For example, in the context of the Industrial Revolution and rising political tensions, the power and authority of the aristocracy were perceived as being insensitive towards others in pursuit of their own personal and selfish ends. In response to this class struggle, Kuypers, in 1891, called for a "Christian socialism" which he thought to be consistent with the history of anti-revolutionary ideals.²⁵ Extended suffrage and worker's rights were examples of his heightened concerns about "equality and fraternity" within Dutch and European culture.²⁶ Even so, in contrast to the Enlightenment, Kuypers declared that the Christian religion alone seeks "personal human dignity in the social relationships of an organically integrated society."²⁷ Only a Christian social democracy upon the metaphysical foundation of God's revelation (I Cor 12:12-27; Eph 4:16) could "redeem" European culture.²⁸

The redemption and restoration of Dutch and European culture for Christ was a primary concern for Kuypers and his party; they were intent upon seeing that life would be more like "heaven" than life in "hell."²⁹ Kuypers was confident that through the power of God and his presence in the Christian community Christianity would survive as a vital force. Both the Stone Lec-

²⁵ Jellema, "Kuypers Attack" 477. One must keep in mind that Kuypers called for a *Christian socialism*; he was no friend of the secular socialists. In fact, Jellema describes Kuypers's socialism as tending "more towards syndicalism or Guild Socialism than it does towards a hierarchically organized corporate state. Society is not arranged vertically but horizontally. The state's task is to protect the social spheres. This may, of course, mean extensive state intervention in certain cases, notably when a social sphere is too weak to exercise its true sovereignty; then the state must help it become strong. Each sphere has its own specific sovereignty which it must not go beyond; if it attempts to, the state must intervene" (ibid. 483). Moreover, it should be said that Kuypers's "Christian socialism" echoed the thoughts of his forerunner, Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831) that understood that a "government functioned to maintain discipline and order in the handiwork of God, which included the well-being of all members of the divine order. The government should therefore see to it that no one stood in need of the basic necessities of life, and it was thus required to provide work for all eager hands (van der Kroef, "Kuypers" 319).

²⁶ At this point, it may be appropriate to state that Kuypers opposed *Laissez-faire* capitalism because he believed it produced a new tyranny throughout Europe (see Jellema, "Kuypers Attack" 484).

²⁷ Kuypers, *Poverty* 44. In terms of the battle between the Enlightenment and Reformed Christianity, his contemporaries knew Kuypers as *de man der antithese* (the man of antithesis). Jellema states: "Since religions eventually pattern all of life, the main divisions in the Netherlands are ideological. This means that the real *political* divisions are not between Conservatives and Liberals and Marxists, but between Christians (or at least those conscious of the ideological implications of their faith) and the followers of the Enlightenment. This is the basic *antithesis*, which runs through modern society. The antithesis is never complete in history, because of God's *gratia universalis* which affects all men; but it is the most basic ideological distinction" ("Kuypers Attack" 480; cf. also van der Kroef, "Kuypers" 320, and S. U. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuypers," in *Communication and Confrontation: A Philosophical Appraisal and Critique of Modern Society and Contemporary Thought* [Toronto: Wedge, 1971] 52-105).

²⁸ See Kuypers, *Poverty* 90 n. 12, 86 n. 1.

²⁹ Ibid. 51.

tures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in October of 1898 and his great work, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, close with positive pictures of the situation in Europe and its future. Posterity is moving towards its eschatological, and just, end—a Christian civil religion.³⁰ Thus, like Groen before him, Kuyper attempted to destroy the new heavenly city of the Enlightenment built with modern materials (Becker), while trying to restore a Christian heavenly city in union with certain secular principles of post-Enlightenment Europe. Suddenly, during the nineteenth century, the Calvinistic view of eschatology emphasized the continuity between the present heaven and earth and the new heaven and earth. In other words, through the social activity of Christians God will bring restoration and redemption to the present creation. Herein, the present creation will be the redeemed new creation without the effects of sin in its creatures as well as in nature.³¹

Perhaps Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), who succeeded Kuyper at the Free University, stated the Dutch neo-Calvinist position more precisely when he wrote:

Therefore Christ has also a message for home and society, for art and science. Liberalism chose to limit its power and message to the heart and the inner chamber, declaring that its kingdom was not of this world. But if the kingdom is not *of*, it is certainly in this world, and is intended for it. The word of God, which comes to us in Christ, is a word of liberation and restoration for the whole man, for his understanding of his will, for his body and his soul.

. . . It [the Gospel] does not kill but makes alive. It does not wound but heals. It is pure grace. And this grace does not cancel nature but establishes and restores it.³²

Bavinck's dominant theme—"grace restores nature"—meant "salvation was essentially a restoration of creation in all its fullness."³³ Does this mean that nature, as we presently perceive it, gradually transforms into a perfect state when the re-creation arrives? It would seem that the answer to this question would be, "yes." After all, Bavinck stated, "Re-creation is not a second, new creation. It does not add any new creatures to the existing order or introduce

³⁰ See his *Calvinism: Six Stone Lectures* (intro. Henry Beets; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931) 258–298, and his *Principles of Sacred Theology* (intro. B. B. Warfield, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 672–679.

³¹ Kuyper's position has been presented as a contrast to the Anabaptist or Gnostic position (see S. U. Zuidema, "Common Grace" 72–73).

³² "Common Grace," *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989) 62; cf. also Herman Bavinck, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 236–238. The latter was an address delivered by Bavinck at the Theological School, Kampen, on December 18, 1888.

³³ Albert M. Wolters, "Creation Order: A Historical Look at Our Heritage," in *An Ethos of Compassion and the Integrity of Creation* (ed. Brian J. Walsh, Hendrik Hart and Robert E. Vander Vennen; Lanham: University Press of America, 1995) 33. Jan Veenhof has observed that "Bavinck's view of the relation of nature and grace is a central part—indeed, perhaps we may say: the central theme, of his theology" (*Nature and Grace in Bavinck* (trans. Albert M. Wolters [Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies] 1). Wolters's translation is from Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam, 1968) 345–365.

a new substance, but it is essentially *reformation*.³⁴ Specifically, “revelation [soteriological] is an act of reformation; in re-creation the creation, with all its forms and norms, is restored; in the gospel, the law; in grace, justice; in Christ, the cosmos is restored.”³⁵ However, just when Bavinck’s position seemed clear to us, he remarked that the present heaven and earth would succumb to the flames of fire. He stated:

It is true that the present heaven and earth will in their form pass away (1 Cor 7:31) and that these, like the ancient earth which was destroyed by the flood, will be burned and purged by fire (2 Peter 3:6,7 and 10). But just as man himself is recreated by Christ indeed, but is not annihilated and thereupon created again (2 Cor 5:17), so too the world in its essence will be preserved, even though in its form it undergoes so great a change that it can be called a new heaven and earth. The world in its entirety, too, moves on to the day of its great regeneration (Matt 19:28).³⁶

Hence, the fire is a cleansing of the present heaven and earth, not the annihilation of it. Bavinck attempted to present the continuity of the present creation and the new heaven and earth with clarity:

. . . by the re-creating power of Christ, the new heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world, radiant in enduring glory and forever set free from the bondage of decay. More glorious than this beautiful earth, more glorious than the earthly Jerusalem, more glorious even than Paradise will be the glory of the new Jerusalem whose architect and builder is God himself. The state of glory will be no mere restoration of the state of nature, but a reformation which, thanks to the power of Christ, transforms all matter into form, all potency into actuality, and presents the entire creation before the face of God, brilliant in unfading splendor and blossoming in a springtime of eternal youth. *Substantially* nothing is lost.³⁷

As he applied such an Aristotelian-Platonic teleological conception of history to the structure of Biblical eschatology, Bavinck solidified the reformational picture of continuity between the creation and the new heaven and earth for his future neo-Calvinist companions in the twentieth century. Specifically, Bavinck and his fellow nineteenth-century neo-Calvinists called Christians, in the context of post-Enlightenment Europe, to restore, transform and redeem the natural, spiritual, cultural and social realm of creation.³⁸ Hopefully, in

³⁴ Bavinck’s quote is found in Veenhof, *Nature and Grace* 8. Moreover, Bavinck wrote, “For the latter [new creation] is never a second, brand-new creation but a re-creation of the existing world. God’s honor consists precisely in the fact that he redeems and renews the same humanity, the same world, the same heaven, and the same earth that have been corrupted and polluted by sin” (*The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next* [ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996] 157).

³⁵ Veenhof, *Nature and Grace* 12.

³⁶ *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine* (trans. Henry Zylstra; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 566.

³⁷ *The Last Things* 160. G. C. Berkouwer provides further insight into Bavinck’s position (see his *The Return of Christ* [ed. Marlin J. Van Elderen, trans. James Van Oosterom; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972] 221).

³⁸ Oddly, Bavinck admitted that he built his position upon the foundation of a “Reformed” synthesis of pietism and Ritschl’s view of the kingdom of God (see Veenhof, *Nature and Grace* 2–3).

accordance with the providence of God, the revitalization of a Calvinistic civil religion can bring to bear a holistic understanding of the presence of God's kingdom upon European culture, and even the entire globe. Essentially this message was delivered by Bavinck in Toronto, Canada in 1892. In a lecture entitled "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on the Moral and Religious Condition of Communities and Nations," he stressed the virtues of Calvinism as a world-transformative movement.³⁹ In an era dominated by European global imperialism, Bavinck gave a Reformed response to the situation. Only the religion of the Protestant Reformation, with its unique understanding of grace restoring nature, could transform the moral and religious conditions of the nations. Irreligious nationalistic global imperialism cannot.

III. TWENTIETH-CENTURY DUTCH NEO-CALVINISM

Following Groen, Kuypers and Bavinck's lead, Dutch neo-Calvinism has gone in at least two directions in the twentieth century. First, creation order neo-Calvinism emphasizes God's laws or norms in the creation order as the condition for social and cultural institutions and their eschatological transformation in a fallen world. Second, shalom neo-Calvinism emphasizes working within the present conditions of society and culture towards the eschatological restoration of peace and justice, i.e. towards the way "things ought to be" for humanity and creation.

Concerning the creation order perspective, Herman Dooyeweerd (1889–1977) and D. H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978) supported and articulated a distinctive Christian approach towards creation norms and societal structures.⁴⁰ Both scholars continued to analyze and formulate the inner nature of God's law in relationship to Kuypers's conception of sphere-sovereignty.⁴¹ For them, the Biblical conception of God's creative sovereignty is cosmogenic, meaning that everything created is subject to God's law.⁴² Specifically, law defines the creation; the order of the creation is a law-order, including the institutions of society.⁴³ God's law, which upholds every aspect of the creation, is a dynamic reality, an active force; it is an indispensable condition of the historical development of the cosmic order. Hence, a distinctive feature of creation order neo-Calvinism is "that it conceives of history as the unfolding of creation, the carrying out of a task contained in the ordinances of creation."⁴⁴ Such a task, building upon Bavinck's insight that grace

³⁹ See Wolters, "Creation Order" 33.

⁴⁰ The position that norms exist in the natural realm suggests another tie to the Enlightenment. As Peter Gay has written, during the Enlightenment many thought that nature supplied the norms for beauty and the standards for conducting our lives (see *Enlightenment* 160). Neo-Calvinism seems to give a Christian theistic interpretation to this naturalistic worldview.

⁴¹ For this reason, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven's work are occasionally referred to as "neo-Kuypersian" (see John H. Kok, *Vollenhoven: His Early Development* [Sioux Center: Dordt, 1992] vii).

⁴² See Dooyeweerd, "Introduction" 9.

⁴³ See Wolters, "Creation Order" 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 42.

restores nature, is expressed in the cultural mandate, or as some prefer, the “creational mandate.” Culture is, therefore, “the bringing forth, through human responsible action, of the riches latent in God’s good creation.”⁴⁵ Herein, God’s law is a dynamic, active force, mediated by humanity, moving the creation through history towards its future eschatological end. Wolters provides an excellent summary of this viewpoint:

From the beginning of human life on earth, the human race is mandated to work toward a great future goal: the development of creation in accordance with God’s design. That development has been disrupted, but not annulled, by the fall into sin, and is reaffirmed in salvation. The goal toward which history moves is therefore not a return to the garden of Eden, but an eschatological fulfillment of creation pictured as the New Jerusalem, into which the glory and honour of the nations will be brought (Rev 21:26). The movement from the primordial garden to the eschatological city embraces history, and is from first to last a struggle for the manifestation of the riches and goodness of creation.⁴⁶

Clearly, a linear or horizontal view of creation and history is the rule here. Wolters constantly points out that neo-Calvinism is at odds with all forms of dualism and annihilationism in respect to creation and history. For example, he notes:

. . . theologians [in the neo-Calvinist tradition] have sometimes spoken of salvation as “re-creation”—not to imply that God scraps his earlier creation and in Jesus Christ makes a new one, but rather to suggest that he hangs on to his fallen original creation and *salvages* it. . . . The original good creation is to be restored.⁴⁷

But how is God going to salvage the original good creation?

We have already noted that God, through the mediating activity of human agents, will bring societal institutions to their eschatological end. In a lecture delivered in 1936 before the Anti-Revolutionary Party, Dooyeweerd stated that a revival and implementation of the Christian idea of the State

⁴⁵ Ibid. At this point, one should realize the influence of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology upon neo-Calvinism. At the turn of the twentieth century, Dutch intellectual life turned to Germany for enlightenment rather than France and Great Britain. Dooyeweerd admitted the German influence: “Originally I was strongly under the influence first of the Neo-Kantian philosophy, later on of Husserl’s phenomenology” (*A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* [trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953] I, v). Albert M. Wolters has provided an excellent discussion concerning this German influence upon Dooyeweerd’s thought (see his “The Intellectual Milieu of Herman Dooyeweerd,” in *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd: Reflections on Critical Philosophy in the Christian Tradition* [ed. C. T. McIntire; Lanham: University Press of America, 1985] 10–17; cf. also Calvin Seerveld, “Dooyeweerd’s Legacy for Aesthetics: Modal Law Theory,” *The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd* 55–64, and Nicolas Wolterstorff, “Points of Unease with the Creation Order Tradition: Response to Albert M. Wolters,” in *Ethos of Compassion* 63). For a thorough study of cultural neo-Kantianism, one should consult Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State, 1978).

⁴⁶ “Creation Order” 42; cf. also his *Creation Regained* 63.

⁴⁷ *Creation Regained* 58.

must stimulate human activity if the kingdom of God is going to have an increasing presence in this creation. In light of the rising tide of Fascism and National Socialism in 1936, Dooyeweerd sounded the alarm:

As soon as Christianity began to compromise learning, culture, and political life with pagan and humanistic philosophy, with its view of state and culture, Christianity's inner strength was broken. At that moment the process of 'becoming like unto the world' began, repeatedly arrested through the grace of God by spiritual *reveil*, a Reformation.

Time and time again such a reformation had to affirm the uncompromising antithesis against the weakening synthesis, the spirit of compromise with the world.⁴⁸

Here, Dooyeweerd referred to the battles of fellow party members during the nineteenth century, and he declared that their tradition is not dead. Rather, "it [Christian State] is still a spiritual treasure, ever new, ever living and inspiring, touching the very heart of one's Christian life—a treasure which we must keep at all costs."⁴⁹ For this reason, a Christian idea of the state must be pursued by every Christian because such an idea "is rooted in the radical, Scriptural view regarding the relationship between the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus and the temporal societal structures, in which God's general and common grace arrests the dry-rot caused by sin."⁵⁰ Only the Christian State can overcome the spiritual and cultural chaos of National Socialism and Fascism, or any other movement of post-Enlightenment cultural humanism.

Like the creation order neo-Calvinists, shalom neo-Calvinists have held that history and nature are moving horizontally towards restoration. There is, however, a notable difference. Shalom neo-Calvinists do not stress a person's responsibility to act in union with the creation norms; rather they stress humans acting for shalom and justice in the present social order. For Nicholas Wolterstorff, possibly the most articulate scholar for shalom neo-Calvinism, the overarching contrast of the two schools is simple: a neo-Kantian model (creation order) versus a Biblical model (shalom order).⁵¹ Specifically, however, Wolterstorff has presented four areas in which he is "uncomfortable" with the creation order tradition.

First, Wolterstorff claims that the creation order tradition has a "legalistic tone" which eventually fails to put the proper emphasis upon the "rights" of the creature.⁵² From his perspective, they hold that God's creative activity is "close to being reduced to God's making things for which God lays down laws, including, in the case of human beings, laws requiring obedience. God the lawgiver almost completely occupies the space of God the Creator."⁵³ Hence, in their construction, Wolterstorff believes the creature to be merely one who is to observe moral obligations.

⁴⁸ *The Christian Idea of the State* (trans. John Kraay; Nutley: Craig, 1978) 3–4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 4. To study further Dooyeweerd's idea of the State, see his *A New Critique* III, 379–508.

⁵¹ "Points of Unease" 63.

⁵² *Ibid.* 64, 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 64.

In contrast, Wolterstorff counters with his understanding of Calvin, who viewed the creation and the cultural mandate as an act of God's love which the creature receives as a gift of God's blessing.⁵⁴ Herein, the creature bears legitimate claim to rights and dignity. For Wolterstorff, rights and responsibility interlock as normative conditions of the creature. In summary, Wolterstorff concluded vaguely: "I have found it more fruitful to think in terms of shalom than in terms of creation orders; . . . For shalom pertains to delight, fulfillment, flourishing of the creatures of the world."⁵⁵

Wolterstorff's second criticism suggests that there is more to the fallenness of the creation than the failure of human beings to follow the directive of God's created law order and facing its consequences.⁵⁶ For him, much of human pain is experienced in connection to things that "should not be." For example, Wolterstorff points out that one does not always tell a divorced person to immediately "undo your divorce" in order to restore God's creational law of marriage faithfulness.⁵⁷ Rather, in many situations a person needs guidance and compassion in the "brokenness" that underlies the way a marriage "should not be." Furthermore, Wolterstorff writes,

A great deal of our human pain is concerned with such should-not-be's. Disabling long-term diseases, early deaths of promising children . . . feminine persons who find themselves in male bodies and male persons who find themselves in female bodies.⁵⁸

Hence, for Wolterstorff we must not only give attention to creation order but also to the brokenness from the way things ought to be.⁵⁹

Third, Wolterstorff holds that Jesus Christ is mysteriously missing in the picture of creation orders. He even states that their formulation has a deistic cast. Even so, he acknowledges that their conception of Christ as the Word of God has eased this deistic picture, and yet, he personally still feels uncomfortable since they accent the revelation of Christ as the second person of the Trinity more than His participation in the creation act.

Wolterstorff's final criticism is directed at the core of the creation order tradition. Wolterstorff thinks it is misleading of Dooyeweerd and his followers to speak of "*the* nature of states, and about *the* norms for states, etc. States are social artifacts."⁶⁰ Here, Wolterstorff seizes the opportunity to declare a weakness in the creation order tradition in order to exalt strength in his own position:

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 65.

⁵⁶ Here Wolterstorff seems to have mind Wolters's "distinction between 'structure', and 'direction' . . . 'Structure' refers to the created cosmos as it was meant to be: 'direction' refers to that cosmos as it is misdirected by sin and redemptively redirected by Christ" (Wolters, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism" 122; cf. also *Creation Regained* 72–73).

⁵⁷ See "Points of Unease" 65.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

⁶⁰ "Points of Unease" 66.

I see no reason to think that the existence of states as we know them today represents the manifestation on the historical scene at long last of natures which God prepared at creation, nor do I think it at all helpful to talk about God-ordained limits and duties of *the* state. Our present day *concept* of a state has an essence, but it doesn't follow that states do, nor does it follow that we have an obligation to struggle to arrange social reality so that our concept has application.⁶¹

In fact, Wolterstorff argues that in the next two hundred years our concept underlining the nature of the state may disappear. Hence, Wolterstorff pre-scribes a different agenda:

Our political obligations are to be determined fundamentally by considering what, given the states that we actually have, conduces to shalom, rather than by considering that we will serve to instantiate *the* nature of *the* state and *the* norms supposedly attached to that nature.⁶²

For Wolterstorff, shalom (peace) is the key underlying concept to measure the movement of culture and society towards its eschatological restoration. In his work *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Wolterstorff describes more clearly his alternative to creation order neo-Calvinism as well as his alternative to liberation theology.⁶³

According to Wolterstorff, in the Old and New Testaments, shalom is intertwined with justice. In shalom, "each person enjoys justice, enjoys his or her rights. There is no shalom without justice. But shalom goes beyond justice."⁶⁴ How? By the human being "dwelling at peace in all his relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature (Isa 11:6–8)."⁶⁵ In fact, Wolterstorff believes that "shalom at its highest is *enjoyment* in one's relationships."⁶⁶ Herein, Jesus is the director, discharger, motivator of shalom. After all, shalom is the fundamental principle of the shalom neo-Calvinist's worldview; "shalom is both God's cause in the world and our human calling . . . it is shalom that we are to work and struggle for."⁶⁷ Although Wolterstorff maintains that the full invasion of shalom into our history is a divine gift, nevertheless, he is clear that "we are not to stand around, hands folded, waiting for shalom to arrive. We are workers in God's cause, his peace-workers. The *missio Dei* is our mission."⁶⁸

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Even within the creation order tradition, questions have been raised concerning the relativity of the norms for each creational sphere. In similar fashion to Wolterstorff's conception of shalom, Hendrik Hart has now presented the ethos of "compassion" as the metaphysical foundation of the various norms in the creation structures (see his "Creation Order in Our Philosophical Tradition: Critique and Refinement," in *Ethos of Compassion* 67–96).

⁶³ His book is a publication of the 1981 Kuyper lectures delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983).

⁶⁴ Ibid. 69.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

If one is following Wolterstorff's argument, it should be apparent that the transformation of society occurs upon the horizontal line of creation-history. Wolterstorff does not hesitate concerning God's cause and our task:

An implication of this is that our work will always have the two dimensions of a struggle for justice and the pursuit of increased mastery of the world so as to enrich human life. . . . Development and liberation must go hand in hand. Ours is both a cultural mandate and a liberation mandate—the mandate to master the world for the benefit of mankind . . . ⁶⁹

The goal is to master, control and possess the world. Hence, in the context of the present social structure, Wolterstorff admits that shalom is a synthesis of certain positive traits from Reformed Kuyperianism and Christian Marxism (liberation theology) as these are placed upon the foundation of a Biblically conceived view of shalom in order to secure a Christian world.⁷⁰

IV. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

From its conception Dutch neo-Calvinism has attempted to transform and reclaim the post-enlightenment culture for the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In doing so, however, much of the agenda of Dutch neo-Calvinism has been built upon the foundation of Enlightenment ideas. Hence, although they attacked the irreligious nature of the Enlightenment and its view of the autonomy of the individual, nevertheless its concept of posterity and its establishment of a somewhat tolerant and egalitarian society of liberty and fraternity have found appeal among them. In my judgment, Dutch neo-Calvinism has become more a child of the Enlightenment and modernity than a movement preserving historic orthodox Calvinism.

For many neo-Calvinists, tolerance concerning the definition of the person of God and towards other religions is becoming increasingly apparent. Wolterstorff has distanced himself from the person of God defined in the Reformed Confessions.⁷¹ He has written:

The picture of God constructed by the classical theologians was that of a God outside of time, dwelling in eternity, ever-present, with no past and no future, impassive, immutable. The picture of the biblical writers is profoundly different: he is past and future as well as present because his *actions* are past and future as well as present: his actions are located in our history.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See *ibid.* 72. Wolterstorff's sympathies towards liberation theology are clearly set forth in a review of an anthology edited by Ronald Nash, entitled *Liberation Theology* (Milford: Mott Media, 1984); see his "Simplistic Distortions," *The Reformed Journal* 35 (June 1985) 19–21, and "The Moral Significance of Poverty," *Perspectives* 6 (February 1991) 8.

⁷¹ See the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, article 1, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 2.

⁷² *Justice and Peace* 151; cf. also his "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob* (ed. C. Orlebeke and L. Smedes; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975) 181–203, "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (ed. Thomas V. Morris; Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1988) 196–203; *Lament For a Son* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987). In criticizing the traditional Reformed position, Kelly James Clark has aligned himself with liberation theology

The imminent identity of God in history is a theme that is typical of modern critical and liberal scholars from Schleiermacher to the present process theologians. Perhaps, it is revealing when Wolterstorff remarks that he wishes to stand between Barth and Schleiermacher.⁷³ Such a position has many ramifications, however at this point Wolterstorff is comfortable to tolerate any monotheistic religion whose God is identified with his activity in history. There are three: Christianity, Judaism and Islam.⁷⁴ Each religion's conception of God is rationally credible; each religion worships the same God. Wolterstorff spells out his position:

Furthermore, we must seriously consider the possibility that, at least in the case of Jews and Muslims, the non-Christian is *not* worshipping a different god, not worshipping an idol, but merely worshipping differently the same god, the one and only God. Worshipping him deficiently, yes—so I as a Christian will say; but nonetheless worshipping *God*.⁷⁵

In this light, anyone who wishes to say that the God of Christian theism is the one and only true God will be viewed as being intolerant and out of line. Hence, consistent with Wolterstorff's position, the fiftieth session of the Reformed Ecumenical Council entertained the issue whether salvation can be found in non-Christian religions. It seems that many neo-Calvinists no longer feel comfortable defending the uniqueness of the Christian God or the orthodox Christian doctrine of salvation.

Wolterstorff's imminent identity of God in history is consistent with the present applications of Bavinck's famous statement: "Grace restores Nature." Bavinck's premise continues to provide the basis for the holistic restoration

and the fundamental philosophers of process theology (e.g. Charles Hartshorne; see his "Hold Not Thy Peace At Tears: Methodological Reflections on Divine Impassibility," in *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology* [ed. Kelly J. Clark Boston: Kluwer, 1992] 173). In defense of the traditional position, one can consult Paul Helm's article, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy: Papers Presented at the Third Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1989* (ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron; Edinburgh: Rutherford, 1990) 119–140.

⁷³ See his "What New Haven and Grand Rapids Have to Say to Each Other," *The Stob Lectures of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary 1992–93* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, 1993) 46.

⁷⁴ Both Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga demonstrate that they are more interested in defending theism than Christian theism. Possibly, most revealing are the comments of Plantinga: "... my aim, in this talk, is to give some advice to philosophers who are Christians. And although my advice is directed specifically to Christian philosophers, it is relevant to all philosophers who believe in God, whether Christian, Jewish, or Moslem. I propose to give advice to the Christian or theistic philosophical community" ("Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 1 [July, 1984] 254; cf. also Wolterstorff's, "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?" in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* [ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff; Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1983] 135; and his *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that Speaks* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995] ix–11).

⁷⁵ Wolterstorff, "On Christian Learning," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffisen and Richard J. Mouw; Lanham: University Press of America, 1989) 70–71.

of all the creational structures in history. Moreover, the present understanding of history continues to show the influence of what Dr. J. Klapwijk called “19th century romantic historical idealism.”⁷⁶ Specifically, God (*Geist*) in history develops the sacred domain of nature (creation) from potentiality to actuality. Working within this framework, we have already noted that the creation order neo-Calvinists emphasize a creation order picture of restoration, whereas shalom neo-Calvinists emphasize a shalom picture of restoration. Both sides provide, however, further insight to their respective outworking of eschatological history.

For example, Al Wolters (creation order) maintains that the idea of reforming culture includes sanctification and progressive renewal.⁷⁷ Sanctification is an internal revitalization, which comes upon the people of God through the Holy Spirit. Specifically, the people of God are called and led by the Holy Spirit to purify the “creation from sin on the basis of Christ’s atonement and victory.”⁷⁸ Their task is not to overthrow the existing *status quo*; rather, they are to be engaged in the activity of progressive renewal in order to see the gradual transformation of all creational structures. Herein, we are reminded of the epistemological foundation of this optimistic picture of renewal. Man, as created in the image of God, is born with an “intuitive awareness” of the nature or structure of societal institutions. According to Wolters, presently each societal institution is a positivization of its original creational structure; the positivization of each creational structure is a matter of putting into practice a creational norm that is an innate intuition within man. Christians, under the dominance of the Holy Spirit, are the keys in God’s progressive renewal of culture—bringing about the final positivization of creational and societal structures.

In this construction, I believe that the fall into sin is viewed more as an offense against the creational norms than an offense against our personal relationship with God. As a consequence, the focus on the doctrine of sin and redemption has become Romans 8:19–22 (the liberation of the creation from the bondage of decay) instead of the entire fifth chapter of Romans.⁷⁹ Although these passages should not be set up against each other, nevertheless Romans five seems presently to receive less attention.⁸⁰ In my judgment,

⁷⁶ See his “Calvin and non-Christian Philosophy” 51.

⁷⁷ *Creation Regained* 74–77. Although Wolters belongs in the creation order tradition that does not mean one should identify him with every position that seems to be emerging out of the creation order tradition in recent years. One must keep this in mind as we proceed in our discussion.

⁷⁸ *Created Regained* 74.

⁷⁹ Nowhere in Wolters’s section on the fall does he mention Romans chapter five (*Creation Regained* 44–56; cf. also Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984] 93–116). To any person standing in the Reformed tradition, this is odd. Both *The Belgic Confession* (articles 14 and 15) and *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter 6) almost exclusively view the fall into sin along the lines of Romans chapter five (looking back to Genesis 2 and 3). In fact, both Confessions mention little, if anything, about the cosmic effects of sin.

⁸⁰ For an overview of the present discussion on Romans eight, one can consult John Bolt’s “The Relation Between Creation and Redemption in Romans 8:18–27,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (April 1995) 34–51.

therefore, the cosmomic law philosophy imposes its system upon Biblical revelation at the expense of Romans five. We are told that the creation norms are inferred from Scripture, and as such, those norms are the activity of human interpretation. As Wolterstorff and even the creation order scholar Hendrik Hart maintain, it is not always clear what those norms are and how they apply to God's original intent. For example, what is the norm for a family, or more narrowly, for a marriage?

For the creation order scholar James Olthuis, *troth* (love) is the creation norm of human relationships, including marriage. Since a homosexual relationship experiences a *troth* relationship, than a same-sex marriage is permissible and even recommended. In Olthuis's estimation, the Bible nowhere states that a same-sex relationship is against the creation order (e.g. Gen 1–2; Rom 1). Rather, a trothful same-sex commitment is a “sign of God's abundant grace, a token of God's future in a fallen world.”⁸¹ In other words, since *troth*, love and compassion rule the future eschaton, then same-sex commitments fulfill that mandate presently. For Olthuis, such a commitment is a normative routing of cultural redemption into the present. Here, like the Enlightenment, Olthuis's conception of “posterity” is shaped by freedom, equality and fraternity which must be projected into the present status of society and culture—an ethos of compassionate egalitarianism and love (*troth*) being experienced in the present confines of God's kingdom. In my judgment, Olthuis's application of a creation norm changes the clear Biblical message about marriage and homosexuality (Gen 2:18–25; Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10).

As we redirect our thoughts towards shalom neo-Calvinists, we must pause to mention and briefly investigate that both the creation order perspective and the shalom perspective stand in the tradition of Christian democratic socialism in the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Thus, both movements have appealed to H. Richard Niebuhr's transformation of historic Calvinism into Christian socialism as their Biblical and Reformed understanding of Christ, the transformer of culture.⁸² Interestingly, one hears little from

⁸¹ “When is Sex Against Nature?” in *Ethos of Compassion* 202. For some in the creation order tradition, Hendrik Hart has attempted to provide hermeneutical justification for the inclusion of homosexuals into the full fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ. He writes: “Normally Reformed people would not be tempted to derive their sense of what is ‘natural’ straight from the Bible, nor would they use the Bible to become informed and knowledgeable about homosexuality. Reformed Christians have a long tradition of regarding the Bible as a book of faith and not as a text for geology (the flood), biology (evolution), hygiene (purity code), economics (jubilee), or whatever else. The Bible gives us our ultimate perspective, our fundamental orientation for our lives, but does not provide us with data and concepts we can simply and directly use in our time. Its concrete morality is not and cannot be ours. It is not a moral text. Christian faith is not moralistic” (“Foreword,” in Pim Pronk's, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality* [trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993] xiii).

⁸² John Bolt has challenged the students of theology to compare Niebuhr's classic work, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), with Bavinck's article, “The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church” (see “Editorial,” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 [November 1992] 217). Personally, I am amazed at the uncritical approach to Niebuhr's work on the part of Calvinists since he was a strong proponent of neo-orthodox theology and a socialistic interpretation of the kingdom of God (see Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey* [trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989] 270–274).

either side that Niebuhr freely admitted that Augustine and Calvin did not endorse his “Reformed” conversionist’s (transformationist’s) view. Although Niebuhr admitted that Augustine and Calvin provided some direction, it was F. D. Maurice, the English theologian and socialist, who provided the best conception of Christ, the transformer of culture in the modern era.⁸³ Dutch neo-Calvinism has followed in the same direction.⁸⁴ Wolterstorff concedes that his own agenda for cultural transformation appears to be a close ally to secular socialism.⁸⁵ In fact, as Wolterstorff attempts to distance himself from secular socialism, all he does is to give a Christian cast to his socialist program. Even so, it provides further insight into the shalom perspective. Specifically, Wolterstorff maintains that a “Christian’s way of being-in-the-world” should be shaped by worship and liturgy.⁸⁶ Following the theologian of the Orthodox Church, Alexander Schmemmann, Wolterstorff holds that “worship is the response to one’s apprehension of the ultimate meaning and nature of *this* world, not some other world. It is the response to one’s apprehension of *this* world as the epiphany of God.”⁸⁷ In fact, this world was given to man to be a “sacrament of divine presence” and communion with God.

For Wolterstorff the sacramental worship of God in this world is not totally sufficient; he also maintains that our worship includes responsible development of the potentials of the world and our responsibility to love our neighbor.⁸⁸ Herein, the liturgy of our sacramental relationship with God’s creation demands responsible action, i.e. “Christian liturgy is an interchange between actions of proclamation [reading of Scripture and preaching] and

⁸³ Niebuhr stated: “In Maurice the conversionist idea is more clearly expressed than in any other modern Christian thinker and leader” (ibid. 229). Much of our understanding of F. D. Maurice’s thought is dependent upon his editorials and articles in the Christian Socialist weekly, *Politics for the People*, which he founded. The paper collapsed after seventeen issues between May and July of 1848. He also wrote *The Kingdom of Christ* (1842), which has been reprinted under the title, *The Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven* (Greenwood: Attic, 1977).

⁸⁴ Cf. Richard J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973), his *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), his “Reforming Cultural Calvinism,” *The Reformed Journal* 31 (March 1981) 12–17, and Stephen V. Monsma, *Pursuing Justice in Sinful World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984). Recently, Richard Mouw has attempted to bring a synthesis between the Reformed perspective of “dominion politics” (cultural mandate) and the Anabaptist perspective of the “politics of Jesus” (peace). In such a model, cultural transformation will truly possess the characteristics of shalom, care and servanthood (see “Creational Politics: Some Calvinist Amendments,” *Christian Scholars’s Review* 23 [December 1993] 181–193).

⁸⁵ See *Justice and Peace* 146. This admission is made after presenting his agenda for three-quarters of the book. Then, after he makes this admission, he attempts to distance himself from its secular connotations. Yet, despite his claim that he “has never been infatuated with socialism,” I, along with James Skillen, find his attempt to separate himself from socialism to be vague (James Skillen, “Politics and Justice and Peace,” *The Reformed Journal* 34 [December 1984] 17–22, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Reply by Nicholas Wolterstorff,” *The Reformed Journal* 34 [December 1984] 23–29).

⁸⁶ *Justice and Peace* 147.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 150. Schmemmann’s position corresponds closely to that of Paul Tillich (see Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948] 86; cf. also Sylvia Keesmaat and Brian Walsh, “Keeping the Garden: At Home in Alberta,” *Perspective: News from the Graduate Institute for Christian Studies* 30 [September 1996] 3).

⁸⁸ *Justice and Peace* 150–151.

actions of worship.”⁸⁹ These actions are practiced in executing the vision of “world-formative Christianity,” or to make *this* world the world of “shalom.”⁹⁰ Hence, for Wolterstorff, the liturgical *praxis* of transforming the sacrament of the cosmos into Christ’s kingdom echoes Marx’s final *Theses of Feuerbach*: “The issue is not to describe the world but to change it.”⁹¹ For this reason, Christians are to work hard for shalom, making something significant of their lives.⁹² As students of God’s creation, “we have been assigned to seek justice for our neighbors and, whenever we can, to relieve them from the tyranny of their suffering.”⁹³ This Progressive neo-Calvinist vision of shalom seems close to the imagery of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice that epitomized many of the principles of nineteenth-century socialism and Marxism as they had applied the Enlightenment to their own world.

Similar to the creation order perspective, I believe that the shalom perspective views the fall into sin as an offense against the concept of shalom more than an offense against God. Although Plantinga states that all sin is an affront to God, nevertheless, this is not sufficient for a specific understanding of sin.⁹⁴ Rather, he writes:

God is, after all, not arbitrarily offended. God hates sin not just because it violates his law but, more substantively, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be. (Indeed, that is why God has laws against a good deal of sin.) God is for shalom and *therefore* against sin. In fact, we may safely describe evil as any spoiling of shalom, whether physically (e.g. by disease), morally, spiritually or otherwise.⁹⁵

In my judgment, Plantinga is saying that sin is a specific transgression against an *a priori* metaphysical idea (shalom) rather than a transgression against the identity and person of God. Moreover, although Plantinga holds that it is imperative to have an understanding of sin in order to appreciate the depths of God’s grace, nevertheless, in the final kingdom of shalom he hints that Abel and Cain will be reconciled to each other and to God. He writes:

We have reason to think the struggles will one-day cease. The reason is, as Oliver O’Donovan puts it, that Jesus Christ ‘represented both innocent Abel and guilty Cain, and reconciled them to each other and to God.’ Jesus Christ, the naturally innocent one, the natural Abel, ‘became sin’ for us (2 Cor 5:21). He took Cain’s place as well as Abel’s.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Ibid. 157. Wolterstorff has explained further his view of the relationship of worship and liturgy for social action (see “Trumpets, Ashes, and Tears,” *The Reformed Journal* 36 [February 1986] 17–22; “Liturgy, Justice, and Holiness,” *The Reformed Journal* 39 [December 1989] 12–20; and “Not Presence But Action: Calvin on Sacraments,” *Perspectives* 9 [March 1994] 16–22).

⁹⁰ *Justice and Peace* 162, 177; cf. also Plantinga, *Not the Way* 196.

⁹¹ *Justice and Peace* 164; cf. also Karl Marx, “Theses of Feuerbach [1845],” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (ed. Robert C. Tucker; 2d ed.; New York: W. W. Norton, 1978) 145.

⁹² See Plantinga, *Not the Way* 196–197.

⁹³ Ibid. 197.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.* 13–14.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 171–172.

Such a conception of universalism is consistent with Niebuhr's position that, in support of Maurice, attacked any conception of dualism including "the separation of mankind into redeemed and condemned."⁹⁷ There will be no final negative action by God towards sin. After all, shalom is an egalitarian society in which everyone who has been victimized by sin will be released.

Presently, the empirical replica of this egalitarian model seems to be in crisis. As I have been stating, over the past two centuries Dutch neo-Calvinism has identified itself with Christian democratic socialism. With the collapse of socialism in Europe as an alternative ideology to social-democratic capitalism in the mid-1980s, even a Christian democratic socialist is faced with an identity crisis in light of the rising tide of free market economic activity.⁹⁸ Europe is facing an ideological crisis that penetrates the spiritual life of her churches. In light of this serious crisis, Julie M. Hopkins, a British native who is the lecturer and researcher of feminist theology at the Free University, maintains that "feminist theology is the last gasp of many thinking women in the churches [European] to renew the faith before Christianity perishes for lack of vision."⁹⁹ Originally, feminist theology criticized European culture and Christian theology on the basis of "the emancipatory ideas of the Enlightenment."¹⁰⁰ In light of the present "souless" effects of free-market economies, Hopkins holds that equal rights are only the first stage of the feminist vision.¹⁰¹ Presently, the goal of feminist theology must be "the critical transformation of women and men into a new way of being church where salvation in its broadest sense as physical, social and spiritual fullness is enjoyed and shared as a sign of hope to the world."¹⁰² This goal is attained by reconstructing a new feminist christology which already presupposes the feminist deconstruction of christology.¹⁰³ In other words, it is assumed that

⁹⁷ *Christ and Culture* 229; cf. also 225. Perhaps Niebuhr and Plantinga are echoing the universalistic position of Karl Barth as found in his *Humanity of God* (trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser; Atlanta: John Knox, 1960) 52–62.

⁹⁸ See Julie M. Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology: Jesus of Nazareth, European Women, and the Christological Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995) 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 9. In America, Wolterstorff does not see feminist theology as the "last gasp"; rather, feminist theology is one part of the liberating menu of shalom as the church presently exists "between the times." He writes: "We live between the times, between the breaking up of an old order and the birth of a new one. It is a new order of justice and flourishing. The old order in which the ranks of women's voices were muffled—that old order is coming to an end. Slowly and with pain, but it is ending; it really is ending. We have seen signs of that, clear signs, of flourishing and of justice" ("Between the Times," *The Reformed Journal* [December 1990] 20).

¹⁰⁰ Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* 9.

¹⁰¹ See *ibid.* 8–9. One may want to compare the agenda of this initial stage with Friedrich Engels's view of women ("The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," in *The Marx-Engels Reader* 734–759).

¹⁰² Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* 9.

¹⁰³ See *ibid.* 9–10. The process of deconstruction has also been applied to the person of God by American neo-Calvinist feminists. One of its leaders is Marchiene Vroon Rienstra, who writes: "Other women, though they may not have been personally abused in such awful ways, are increasingly uncomfortable relating to the solely male God depicted by the patriarchal cultural influence in Christianity. Other images of God feed their souls: Spirit, Comforter, Friend, loving Mother. As women increasingly recognize their distinctive awareness is articulated and then accepted in the

cultural contexts and philosophical presuppositions that are no longer relevant (deconstruction) shape all the christologies presented in the New Testament, creeds, the western and eastern churches, and the Reformation.¹⁰⁴ Hence, the goal of constructing a new christology must arise within a global pluralistic context in which the cultural and socio-economic conditions shape our doctrine of Christ (reconstruction).¹⁰⁵ In these countries, best experienced in third world countries, the liberating effects of Christ are an existential experience of individual and cultural faith. Only this type of faith is relevant to the believer.¹⁰⁶ After all, anyone who subscribes to a universal dogmatic or monolithic christology is guilty of imposing religious *imperialism*.¹⁰⁷

EPILOGUE

In light of recent events in Europe, Hopkins has come to realize that a synthesis of the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and the tradition of neo-Calvinist democratic socialism are no longer sufficient for the liberation of the cultural and socio-economically oppressed throughout the world. The liberation of the oppressed is now dependent upon the maintenance of democratic socialistic ideals in the context of a post-modernist's world. Perhaps my original thesis continues to evolve. As neo-Calvinism enters the twenty-first century, if the neo-Calvinist rebuilt the modern city with enlightened-Christian materials, then the neo-Calvinist of the twenty-first century will rebuild the enlightened-Christian city in accommodation to post-modern materials. The restoration of the creation norms and shalom will accommodate the pluralistic and existential needs of every oppressive cultural and socio-economic context. Finally, in a post-modern extension of eschatological restoration, Enlightenment, egalitarianism and the premise, grace restores nature, truly triumph without the foundation of *a priori* rational categories.¹⁰⁸ Hence, in the context of this new and foreign Calvinistic religion, whatever happened to the believer's final inheritance in the eschatological glory of the person of God, especially the second person of the Trinity?

church, a better balance is developing between the ways men and women image God and relate to God. As both men and women become able to see the feminine as well as the masculine face of God, the image of God is gradually losing its idolatrous identification with maleness" ("Grounded in Gender," *Perspectives* 10 [November 1995] 9).

¹⁰⁴ See Hopkins, *Towards a Feminist Christology* 11

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ As Hopkins writes: ". . . people from different cultural and socio-economic contexts have different existential needs and therefore different understandings of what salvation is and how it is to be realised or received" (*ibid.* 12).

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.* 12–13. Hopkins goes so far as to say: "The Bible, the Creeds, confessions of faith, the sacraments, liturgies and hymn books are aids to faith, but only to the extent that they open the possibility to disclosures of the divine. They are mediums to truth but not truth itself. This observation accords with the post-modernist insight that our experience is to a great extent a social construction of language" (*ibid.* 13).

¹⁰⁸ See James D. Bratt, "Puritan Schools in a Quaker Age," *Perspectives* 10 (August/September 1995) 15.