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Theology as Study of Faith-Life*

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Critical reflection¹ on theology in higher education raises at least four different, though related, questions: the *encyclopedic* question of the unique role of theology as a science² among other sciences, the *epistemic* question of what we know about the character and limitation of theoretical knowledge, the *curricular* question of the possibility of Christian higher education, and the *cultural* question of what Christian higher education means for everyday life. This paper will focus primarily on the encyclopedic question.³

In Western higher education, religion is customarily thought of as a phenomenon that may legally be taught in public, i.e., tax-supported, state colleges and universities. In contrast, theology is usually viewed as a private concern of Jews and Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians that may be taught only in synagogue- or church-supported seminaries and private, i.e., not tax-funded, colleges.

It is commonly assumed that courses in religion focus more on a person's *natural* faith-life, especially his or her psychic, socio-economic, and artistic projections of fundamental values, whereas courses in theology are more concerned with a person's so-

called *religious* faith activities and content, in particular God as supernatural Being and human beings as confessional responders to this self-revealing Being.

This way of distinguishing between the disciplines of religion and theology finds one of its main reasons in the major shift, in nineteenth-century Western education, from divine transcendence to human immanence, from medieval supernaturalism to modern naturalism, from heaven-directed theocentrism to earth-centered anthropocentrism. This radical shift from God's revelation of Himself to human beings to humanity's projection of itself to God contributed to a philosophically momentous change of paradigm from thought to experience, theory to practice, system to life, dogma to ritual, reception to perception, object to subject, and content to method.⁴

This enormous shift led people to see that as a humanity-centered science, theology could not be correctly understood apart from studies of political activities, economic conditions, social situations, psychic developments, and artistic expressions. Pulled down, as it were, from its presumed safety and objectivity in a spiritual and supernatural realm,

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theology became increasingly exposed to the dangers and subjectivity of historical and natural realities. This exposure, in turn, raised theoretically complex questions regarding understanding faith as content (cf. hermeneutics) and caused ecclesiastically unsettling events related to faith as practice (cf. schisms).⁵

This radical shift in worldview, and concomitant change in theorizing in various sciences, made scholars reflect more on what theology is and how it serves in academic as well as daily life. Today, when they think about what they are actually doing, theology teachers in denominational seminaries and religion instructors in public universities, undergraduate and graduate, cannot escape such encyclopedic questions.

To clarify this issue, I shall point out various problems with the traditional concept of theology, offer a redefinition of theology, and indicate what such a changed view of theology implies.

Traditional Theology

With respect to what it investigates and how it relates to other disciplines, the traditional view of theology, as used in academic and practical life, has been confusing, to say the least.

1. Theology and Beliefs

If we equate "theology" with "Christian beliefs," as is commonly done in academic circles and daily parlance, we must conclude absurdly that every believer in the Triune God is a theologian, that every theologian is a believer in the true God, and that heretics and unbelievers cannot be theologians or have a theology.

To avoid such ridiculous conclusions we must, first of all, distinguish between what Christians (and non-Christians) believe and a systematic study of such beliefs. Failure to make this distinction is detrimental to both faith-life and theology as study of faith-life. If we intellectualize faith-life, we sooner or later elevate theoretical differences to confessional conflicts and schisms, and if we 'confessionalize' theological systems, we prevent authentic science from investigating ideas in abstract and tentative ways. Secondly, we must acknowledge the existence not only of Christian theology but also of non-Christian, or pagan, and anti-Christian, or sectarian, theologies.

2. Theology and Field of Investigation

Assuming that theology is a distinct discipline and may not be equated and confused with Christian beliefs, we must ask what does theology investigate? At least five wrong answers have been given to this question: God, revelation, Scripture, creed, and church.

First, as Creator, *God* is the condition for, not part of, created reality. Only the world as created by God and experienced or known by human beings can be investigated by any science, including the science of theology. Being incomparable, the Creator of all things is not an object to be studied by human creatures. To investigate God in a scientific way invites biblically unwarranted and philosophically senseless speculation. Knowing God in a biblical way differs radically from speculating about him through a scientific study (*logos*) of God (*theos*). Neither does theology investigate God's *revelation*. To claim it does implies that, in distinction from the other sciences, theology has a monopoly on knowing and studying God's self-revelation. Such a view ascribes, in medieval fashion, a queenly role to theology among the other sciences, encourages further radical secularizing⁶ of non-theological disciplines, assigns a mediational role to theology, and expects it to Christianize all non-theological sciences by somehow relating them to God as Creator and Redeemer.

Avoiding the error of investigating incomparable God in His creation-encompassing revelation, many Christians, especially Lutherans, Calvinists, and Baptists, have suggested that theology studies *Scripture*, as God's special revelation. Inasmuch as it recognizes that non-theological scientists can acknowledge God's general revelation, this view does not secularize non-theological disciplines as readily and radically as do the two views mentioned above.

However, neither is this approach satisfactory. It does not account for the fact that theology studies not only Scripture but also language, archeology, tradition, rhetoric, liturgy, counseling, art, etc. As a matter of fact, even a theological study of Scripture is itself impossible without a study of extra- or non-biblical facets of life and reality.

Furthermore, if theology merely investigates *creeds*, i.e., confessional testimonies or historically-shaped personal and communal witnesses to God's revelation, theology is restricted to analyzing only

certain faith-activities and only a small part of faith-content; furthermore, it isolates theology from the rest of life and does injustice to God's norms for faith-life and the importance of non-confessional dimensions of faith-life.⁷

Finally, limiting theology to a systematic study of *churches* as organized Christian faith-communities will not do either. It does not sufficiently account for such non-ecclesiastical, yet theological, phenomena as private devotions, heretical beliefs, pagan rituals, cults as non-Christian faith-communities, and antithesis or religious conflict in faith-life.⁸

3. Theology and Other Disciplines

The way theology has been related to other disciplines can best be described in terms of isolation, opposition, addition, and culmination. If theology is seen in *isolation* from other disciplines, the integrality of the body of sciences is violated and injustice is done to the unity of practical life. When theologians isolate theology from other disciplines and from culture and history, as some insulated seminaries tend to do, theology becomes irrelevant.

Placing theology in *opposition* to supposedly dangerous non-theological disciplines confuses the theoretical encyclopedic relation between theology and other sciences with the non-theoretical religious contrast between obedience and disobedience to God. Such confusion distorts the character and role of theology and misdirects the religious thrust of human existence.⁹

Viewing theology as an *addition* to other sciences makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to account for the numerous influences of non-theological disciplines on theology even before such (so-called sacred) theology is added to these sciences.

Lastly, theology has been viewed in semi-mystical fashion as the *culmination* of all the other disciplines. With all the sciences arranged in hierarchic order from lower and material to higher and intellectual knowledge, theology becomes a capstone course. In distinction from these lower disciplines, theology is then the most important, even holy, discipline in a curriculum by virtue of the fact that God is its object of investigation, requiring ecclesiastical ordination of persons teaching this science.¹⁰

4. Theology and Curriculum

Traditional names given to the department asso-

ciated with this discipline are "Bible," "Religion," and "Theology." The first name has been used predominantly in fundamentalist Bible colleges, the second mostly in state colleges and universities, and the third more in mainline denominational seminaries and private Christian liberal arts colleges.¹¹

When the departmental name *Bible* is used, the curriculum tends to consist almost exclusively of Bible courses and the instruction primarily of an extension of spiritual nurture received at home and catechetical training provided in churches. Having God's special revelation in Scripture as its main focus, it relativizes, sometimes ignores, his general revelation in the rest of creation, i.e., in human, or cultural, and non-human, or natural, history.

Such Bible-oriented education is prominent in many methodist, pentecostal, and fundamentalist circles. Biblicistically, it stresses the religious, i.e., vertical and personal, dimension of life and minimizes issues affecting the structure of society, the shape of culture, and the course of history.

To call the department *Bible* is not correct, however. It does not sufficiently reflect what the department is and does. It tends to assume that knowing the full and true meaning of life is a privilege of Bible students, and hence the department claims too much for itself as to what it can and must do. At the same time, a Bible department claims too little for itself, because actually it offers not only Bible courses but also courses in language, music, history, liturgics, psychology, etc.

The name *Religion* department is more common in liberal arts colleges and universities. As we stated above, in many Bible departments the relevance of faith for society and culture is often minimized and attention more directed to private faith activities isolated from the rest of life, and to faith content limited to personal beliefs, especially belief in the Scriptures. The opposite occurs often in Religion departments. Here the influence of faith activities on practical life in society receives more attention, together with the impact of public life on one's private faith activities and content. Instructors and students of religion are usually more interested in witnessing in society, interpreting culture, and relating God's Word to life than they are in studying privatized religion and creeds as isolated statements of belief. This emphasis on ever-changing subjective faith activities, and implied beliefs, has contributed to developmental explanations, often in

terms of evolutionistic assumptions, of faith-life.

Generally, religion is thought of, however, either as only a segment or as mere phase in life. Many Roman Catholics and Protestants view it only as a *segment* of life and equate it with certain private and public faith activities that have no structural or inherent connections with the rest of life. Persons not involved in such distinct but isolated faith activities are not considered to be religious or to have any religion.

In typically secular fashion, positivists, Marxists, and evolutionists believe that religion is only a *phase* in human life, a phase in which human beings are still dependent on certain spiritual or supernatural forces, conditioned by material or socio-economic deprivations, and determined by hopes and fears arising from humanity's evolverment from psychic immaturity towards intellectual maturity.

Recent studies in sociology, economics, history, ethics, psychology, art, literature, and comparative religion have provided ample and compelling evidence, however, that religion is not a mere segment in life developed by dualistic Christians, nor a primitive phase in life abandoned by positivistic thinkers and liberated proletarians. On the contrary, religion appears to be constitutive of human existence, an abiding and all-encompassing and permeating feature of human life.¹²

Those who prefer the designation *Theology* have sensed something of the limitations associated with Bible and anthropocentrism connected with Religion. They have not been sufficiently aware, however, of the origin and meaning of the traditional concept of theology. Originally, theology entails the pagan notion that for human beings to obtain divine knowledge, they must go *beyond* human knowledge. Plato and Aristotle believed theology did precisely this and thereby provided the first and basic principles of philosophy.

Many church fathers incorporated this Greek view of theology into their understanding of the Christian religion. Uncritically accepting the Greek predilection for *theoria*, they introduced an element of intellectualism in Western theology.¹³ This kind of theology, anchored in Christ as Logos, undermined the epistemic distinction, not separation, between intellectual and non-intellectual knowledge and resulted in blurring the distinction between dogmatics and dogma, symbolics and confessions, ecclesiology and church, homiletics and preaching,

lectern and pulpit, hermeneutics and Bible reading, canonics and Scripture, etc.

This blurring of two distinct forms of knowledge occurred in two directions, an Augustinian, or Franciscan, and an Aquinian, or Dominican. The former entailed a neo-Platonic or semi-mystical¹⁴ movement from pulpit to lectern, believing to understanding, and faith to theology; the latter an opposite movement from lectern to pulpit, understanding to believing, and theology to faith. Whereas Augustinian theology tended to explain abstract intellectual matters in concrete confessional terms, Aquinian theology was inclined to explain confessional issues in abstract intellectual terms.

A common assumption in these two major medieval traditions of theology was a fundamental dualism. In terms of this dualism they explained not only reality, society, and culture but also scholarship, education, and curriculum. This dualistic worldview produced a fundamental split between sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, religious and secular, grace and nature, and end and means. It also encouraged anthropological dichotomies between believing and understanding, faith and reason, and meditation and study, developed a view of society patterned after an erroneous distinction between church and academy, seminary and university, and clergy and laity, and gave rise to certain questionable encyclopedic distinctions between religion and science, Bible and learning, chapel and classroom, and theology and philosophy.

This dualistic worldview, adopted in Roman Catholic and many Protestant circles, ascribed to theology the exclusive and lofty role of relating God's supernatural revelation to humanity's natural existence. In directing non-theological disciplines, theology seeks to christianize practical life, the structure of society, and the contours of culture.¹⁵

However, as we saw earlier, instead of influencing the structure and religious direction of other disciplines, theology is itself in many ways influenced by these other sciences. This explains, in part at least, that although there is only one God (cf. Father, Son, and Spirit), one revelation (cf. creation, incarnation, and inscripturation), and one Scripture (cf. Old Testament and New Testament), there are within the Christian tradition many different, at times even conflicting, theologies.

To a large extent, the great impact of non-

theological insights on theological thought and traditions accounts for the rise of different Christian theologies. This begins to explain the influence, for example, of different theories of language and logic on biblical exegesis, of divergent views of truth and history on hermeneutics, of conflicting theories about society on church order, of different principles of education on catechetics, of various schools of psychology on poimenics, of specific traditions of rhetoric on homiletics, of certain schools of philosophy on dogmatics, and of various cultural customs on liturgics.

Such influences are the main source for an almost bewildering variety of nearly always competing theologies, most of which have arisen since the beginning of our twentieth century. We have, for example, dogmatic theology, biblical theology, process theology, existential theology, ecclesial theology, racist theology, feminist theology, lay theology, theology of the cross, theology of hope, theology of revolution, theology of liberation, theology of reconciliation.¹⁶

Given this widespread confusion concerning what constitutes theology, another critical look at encyclopedic questions related to theology is no longer—although it really never has been—an irrelevant philosophical luxury, but a practical educational and curricular necessity. To remove this confusion and clarify the unique character of theology requires more than a few minor corrections. To avoid dilemmas and impasses inherent in the traditional meaning of theology demands a new view of reality and a different encyclopedic understanding of theology.¹⁷

Redefinition of Theology

Assuming that religious reformation of life implies structural reformulation also of encyclopedic issues related to theology, I propose that faith-life, i.e., everything related to the pistical¹⁸ dimension of created reality, be considered as the object of theological investigation. Such theology, more properly called “fideology” or “pistology,”¹⁹ can be defined as follows: *a systematic analysis of the essence, norms, development, and role of the subjective or human and objective or non-human pistical dimension of created reality.*

Understood in this sense, theology (1) avoids troublesome speculations, (2) introduces helpful

distinctions, and (3) opens new perspectives on theological topics otherwise ignored or distorted.

1

Theology in the sense of pistology avoids the speculative notions that theology studies God, his revelation, or religion.²⁰ As the Creator of everything, *God* is not the object of any science, not even theology. Always and everywhere, therefore also in all theological and non-theological sciences, God is to be adored and obeyed. He demands such adoration simply because he is the Creator, and such obedience human beings must show simply because they are his creatures who also in their scientific labors are completely dependent on him. Dissecting this God in a scientific way, reducing him to a proposition, and referring to him as a tentative theory, is speculation bordering on idolatry. It assumes he is not really the incomparable Creator, but only a dimension or a part of the world he has made.

Neither can God’s *revelation* be considered the object of theological investigation. God’s revelation encompasses and expresses itself in all created reality, including human history. The same holds true for *religion*. Since religion is not just a segment (cf. Roman Catholic dualism), or a phase (cf. Comtean positivism and evolutionism) of life, but all of life lived *coram Deo*, no science, not even theology, can analyze it theoretically. Instead of being the object theology investigates, religion determines the spiritual direction of theology, i.e., whether it moves towards or away from God.

In distinction from these speculative views about theology, it is possible, however, to think of theology as a legitimate science or a discipline in its own rights, viz., as a systematic study of the pistical mode of created reality. Such a study resembles sciences of other empirical aspects of reality. As a science uniquely interested in the pistical dimension of reality, i.e., in questions of ultimacy, theology can be distinguished, not separated, from such non-theological sciences, which investigate other dimensions of created reality, as mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, logic, history, sociology, economics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, and ethics.²¹

When theology is used in the sense of fideology or pistology, we can understand more clearly numerous pistically qualified subject-subject rela-

tionships between individual believers and between different faith-communities. The theologian can also understand better the immense variety of confessionally qualified subject-object relationships between human beings, who believe, and non-human objects like things, plants, and animals, which, although they themselves cannot believe, play an indispensable role in human faith-life, and are in numerous ways concretely affected by such faith-life.²²

Through an intricate web of these subject-subject and subject-object relationships, together with many inherent pistical analogies,²³ faith-life is intimately interwoven with other unique facets of creaturely existence and with the sciences responsible for investigating these dimensions. In this manner it is possible, encyclopedically, to see more clearly the relation between theology and other disciplines and to avoid thinking of theology as a supernatural *ad-dendum* to the curriculum or some kind of natural, and ultimately perhaps dispensable, appendix to the sciences related to the non-pistical modes of life.²⁴

2

This redefinition of theology helps us understand that the term "faith" can be used in four different ways, viz., as gift, activity, content, and aspect.

When it refers to God's gracious *gift* of new life, faith is used in the salvific sense of the secret through which sinners are reborn and made willing to obey God's law of love. This faith non-Christians do not possess. Only through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, can believers have this miraculous gift of divine love.²⁵

Secondly, faith can be used in the sense of a human *activity*. In this case, it refers to activities characterized by a human awareness of something ultimate and a surrender to that ultimate. For Christians, this ultimate is the true and only Creator/Redeemer. For non-Christians, it is some absolutized person, thing, idea, myth, or whatever the disbelieving heart conjures up to take the place of the true God.

These faith activities belong to the very structure of human existence. They have not been eradicated by sin. The right religious direction of faith activities may be gone, but this built-in human ability to believe in some personal or impersonal ultimate has remained intact.²⁶

As unbelievers, non-Christians have not lost this creaturely ability to surrender themselves to something ultimate. Their faith-life as such has not been eliminated by their disobedience but, moving in a religiously opposite direction, now functions in a distorted manner.²⁷ Their heart-defiance of God's will manifests itself in the religious misdirection of their faith activities. By regarding as ultimate what is relative, they create idols or pseudo-gods.²⁸

Thirdly, faith can be used in the sense of *content*, i.e., beliefs as centers of certitude or objects of commitment. For Christians, this content is primarily what Scripture has revealed about God as Creator/Redeemer and about human beings as His creatures who believe, sin, and need salvation. But it also includes what they privately and publicly confess in their faith rituals and creedal statements. For unbelievers, i.e., those who disbelieve things revealed by God and believe things not revealed by Him, this content could, for example, be Mohammed's *Qu'ran*, Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon*, or Moon's *Divine Principle*.

Finally, faith can refer to an *aspect* or modal dimension of created reality. This meaning of faith is not as immediately obvious as the three meanings of faith described above. It will be clear, however, when we consider the following. Just as it is proper to say that life is sexual, not sex, so one can say that life is confessional, not confession. The words "sexual" and "confessional" indicate certain modes or ways in which life is experienced and looked at. It would be wrong to restrict the full meaning of life to either one of these modes. Just as life is not only sexual and, therefore, not reducible to sex, so also life is not only confessional and, therefore, reducible to faith-life.

There is another, and perhaps more compelling, reason to talk about this fourth meaning of faith. As aspect, faith is present not only subjectively in the human activity of surrendering oneself to something ultimate, but also objectively in the different ways certain features of non-human creatures like things, plants, and animals function in human faith-life. Traditional theology has generally not been able to give an adequate account of this peculiar use of faith. Either it has ignored these realities, or it has called upon literary experts to explain the implied faith analogies merely in terms of literary metaphors.

As aspect, faith points not only to a certain human

experience of life but also to a certain way in which non-human creatures can play a role in human faith-life. By acknowledging this, the uniquely pistical meaning can be accounted for of such things as stones, wood, and metals in church buildings; water, bread, and wine in sacraments; empty cross, open tomb, and tongues of fire in devotions; stars, clouds, and rainbow in Christian pilgrimage; thorns and thistles, lilies and birds, sheep and goats, mountains and valleys in a believer's faith-life.²⁹

Furthermore, to use theology in the sense of fideology or pistology opens the way to make several other helpful distinctions. For example, equating spirituality and religious direction in human existence introduces a clearer distinction between religion, which encompasses all of life, and faith-life, which refers to only one way in which human life expresses itself. Such a distinction will remove the usual confusion between these two ideas and will do much to halt further religious secularization of non-confessionally qualified, though still religiously directed, activities. Though they are related, religion and faith are not the same. Religion cannot be limited to, localized in, or equated with any one or more distinct human ways of living.

Being the all-encompassing and all-pervading spiritual direction of human existence, religion cannot be the object of any scientific study. However, faith as activity, content, and aspect (though not as gift of grace) can be the object of theoretical investigation. But also in such a theology a religious conflict will manifest itself between radical obedience and disobedience to God's liberating claims on life, including scientific life, and give rise to a fundamental divergence between a Christian and a non-Christian way of theologizing.³⁰

Since faith as activity, content, and aspect constitute the object of theology, it can and must be clearly distinguished from the science of theology which makes a systematic study of such empirical faith-life. Also, clearer distinction can be made between religion, faith, theology, and Bible. In short, this new view of theology acknowledges the difference between Christian and non-Christian religion in concrete faith-life and theology, avoids confusing practical faith-life and abstract theology, relates theology more meaningfully to other sciences, describes more accurately the place of theology in a curriculum, and demonstrates more lucidly the relevance of theology for daily faith-life.

Such a structurally unique study of faith-life opens all sorts of new and exciting perspectives for theologians and other scholars and educators. It calls for a closer co-operation between theological and non-theological scholars. The effect of such cooperation will be a more meaningful study of, for example, various devotional activities, different sacramental symbols, specific creedal traditions, peculiar techniques of faith-instruction, unique methods in pastoral care, diverse forms of proclamation, and concrete phases in church discipline.

By proceeding in this direction, much can be done to reduce, if not eliminate, debilitating suspicion and rivalry between theologians and non-theologians regarding what each is supposed and not supposed to be doing. Above all, it opens new vistas on many fundamental encyclopedic and, by implication, curricular questions concerning such things as the importance of sociology for faith-knowledge, the relevance of psychology for poimenics, the task of linguistics for hermeneutics, the role of history for hearing the radical claims of Scripture, the relation between faith activities and faith content, the significance of faith norms for faith-life, and the need for theology in any well-rounded curriculum, including a good general education.³¹

Endnotes

- 1 "Critical" is used here not in terms of neo-Kantian pure and practical reason or in the neo-Marxian sense of historical and socio-economic critique, but in terms of Christian philosophy developed in the tradition of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), Herman Bavink (1854-1921), Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1976), D. H. Th. Vollenhoven (1892-1978) and others mainly at the Free University in Amsterdam.
- 2 Here and throughout the rest of this paper, *science* is used in the sense of *Wissenschaft*, i.e., as a synonym for an academic discipline, and not in the restricted sense of natural science in distinction from the humanities.
- 3 Time and space do not permit detailed discussion of epistemic, curricular, and cultural issues related to theology. Our present intent is merely to indicate the main contours of a possible solution to encyclopedic problems related to the discipline of theology. By the nature of the case, a number of assumptions will be made and new conceptions posited without detailed argumentation and documentation.
- 4 This change of paradigm was occasioned by (1) a general shift from theistic to humanistic thinking, (2) a negative reaction to arid Roman Catholic and Protestant scholasticism, and (3) a philosophical preoccupation with projecting rational beliefs

- through internal freedom, rather than submitting oneself to some external authority, and with a growing interest in the dynamic character of a constantly developing reality rather than in structural questions of a merely static order of reality.
- 5 To counteract this tendency towards relativism and provide a point of stability in a world of change, the Roman Catholic Church declared the Pope infallible, when speaking *ex cathedra*, and many Protestants stressed the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture in a way not done before.
 - 6 The term *secular* can be used in two ways: (1) a structural or positive way, viz., to get away from the tutelage of instituted churches or so-called organized religion, and (2) a religious or negative way, viz., to escape God's claims upon life. Here it is used in the second sense.
 - 7 Restricting theology and confusing it with confessional life is characteristic of many pietists, monastics, Roman Catholics, and Protestant traditionalists who ascribe a *foundational* role to creeds, as well as of some nineteenth-century liberal and twentieth-century neo-orthodox movements.
 - 8 Cf. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).
 - 9 As something total, *religion* refers to the spiritual direction of life, not just a part or phase of life.
 - 10 This practice is common even today in many private Christian colleges. Also Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University in Amsterdam, had this semi-mystical view of reality and curriculum.
 - 11 Not able to agree on one name and faced with a majority and a minority report, Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Mich., opted for a compromise, viz., *Religion and Theology*, to refer to this department. In 1969, Dordt College decided to replace the curricular name *Bible* with *Theology*.
 - 12 There is an increasing awareness today that religion is inescapable and indispensable for an understanding of, for example, social, political, and educational issues. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959) and *Images and Symbols* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978) and *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981); Hans J. Mol, *Identity and the Sacred* (New York: The Free Press, 1976); and Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society, and Human Rights. A Study in Three Cultures* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).
 - 13 Cf. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, I-III. Translated by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).
 - 14 *Semimystical* refers to a neo-Platonic relativizing of the body and an overemphasis on the mind. Hierarchically, it considers the former lower or less important and the latter higher or more important.
 - 15 This approach has given rise not to an integrated Christian view of reality but only to a theology of labor, theology of industry, theology of play, theology of arts, theology of politics, theology of work, etc. In each instance, theology is ambiguously used as a synonym for a general biblical or Christian view of all sorts of things in reality, not as a specific theory of only the pistical dimension of reality.
 - 16 In distinction from the theologies mentioned in note 15 above, these theologies refer to different theories of faith-life as such.
 - 17 The term theology is so old that chances of its being replaced with another term are nil. We will continue to use the traditional name, therefore, but only in the sense of a study of faith-life. Various epistemic, curricular, and cultural issues implied in such a redefined use of theology will be dealt with at a later date.
 - 18 The term *pistical*, derived from the Greek word *pistis*, refers to faith as a certain mode of acting or way of existing.
 - 19 Cf. the Latin word *fides* for faith. *Fideistics* might perhaps be a better word than *fideology*.
 - 20 Regarding creeds and churches as objects of theology, see above. Since the last century, it is not uncommon to think of psychic behavior, especially the creation or projection of meaning, as the object of the theological investigation. See, for example, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*. Translated by Terrence N. Tice. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970) and James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).
 - 21 Each of these disciplines focuses on a distinct modal dimension of reality. Within each of these rather abstract *modal* disciplines there are the increasingly less abstract or more concrete *individuality, applied, and skills* sciences. In the case of theology, for example, comparative religion, ecclesiology, and symbolics as individuality sciences; homiletics and poimenics as applied disciplines; and preaching and counseling as skills courses.
 - 22 Confusing these pistically qualified subject-subject relationships with other equally confessional subject-object relationships distorts faith activities and faith content (e.g., manipulating fellow believers as though they were stepping stones to wealth or power).
 - 23 Cf. pistical analogies inherent in expressions like "logic of prayer," "movement of faith," "reach of love," "vitality of faith," "anchor of hope," "power of faith," etc.
 - 24 See the classic work of Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, vols I-III; part of which has been translated into English (as *Principles of Sacred Theology*. Translator J. Hendrik De Vries. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954); P. J. Roscam Abbing, *Oriëntatie in de Theologische Wetenschap* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, n.d.); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*. Translated by Francis McDonagh. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976).
 - 25 Cf. Hab. 2:4, Rom. 4:3, Phil. 3:9, Heb. 11:33, John 3:15 and 5:24.
 - 26 For details, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

- 27 These distortions have given rise to all sorts of sects and cults, each with its own peculiar beliefs and faith activities.
- 28 Cf. Rom. 1:18-32 and Is. 44:6-20.
- 29 In the same way, one can understand more clearly the pistical meaning of also such things as lamb and lion, sacrifice and payment, sackcloth and ashes, breastplate and helmet, jewels and crowns, marriage and banquet, and bride and groom in a Christian's faith-life.
- 30 This religious conflict between loving and rejecting God's law may never be confused with the encyclopedic distinction between theology and other sciences.
- 31 The encyclopedic question of theology has a direct bearing on political life. It affects, for example, the problem

of freedom to teach theology in public or tax-supported colleges and universities and the question of true democracy in providing tax-support for so-called private Christian colleges and universities. For details, see John C. Vander Stelt, "Theology or Pistology?" in *Building the House: Essays on Christian Education*, edited by James A. De Jong and Louis Y. Van Dyke (Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 1981), 115-135, especially 131-132. Although in a different, and in my opinion wrong, manner, the American Academy of Religion also deals with these and related matters (cf. its pamphlet distributed to all its members in September, 1988, on "Religion in the Public School Curriculum. Questions and Answers.")