
Pro Rege

Volume 8 | Number 2

Article 4

December 1979

Place and Nature of History as a Scientific Study

Nick Van Til

Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Van Til, Nick (1979) "Place and Nature of History as a Scientific Study,"

Pro Rege: Vol. 8: No. 2, 17 - 27.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol8/iss2/4

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

The Place and Nature of History as a Scientific Study

Nick Van Til
Professor of Philosophy



Mr. Van Til received his A.B. from Calvin College. Subsequent to military service in World War II he spent a semester at Westminster Theological Seminary in the study of Apologetics. Thereafter he received M.A. degrees from the University of Michigan in both history and philosophy and followed further graduate studies in philosophy at Michigan State University. Mr. Van Til is a charter member of the Dordt College faculty and is chairman of the Theology-Philosophy Department.

Those students of history who have come under the influence of Herman Dooyeweerd generally insist that we should not proceed with the study of the discipline until we have taken account of the characteristics of the discipline. We should first decide whether history can be included in the fourteen or fifteen modalities of theoretic thought; and having determined that, we must then give it a place in the encyclopedic order of the modalities as they reflect the order of creation.

In a 1973 *Pro Rege* article,¹ I expressed my dissatisfaction with Dooyeweerd's modality structure. I argued that history does not have a

place in the modal structure as one of the aspects of that order. Through history we take an overview of the total order. Like philosophy, history has an integrative function. Because Dooyeweerd argued that time gives coherence to the modal aspects,² he should also have concluded that history transcends the modal order, giving it chronological coordinates and integration. History should stand outside the modal order and not be included in it.

In a 1975 contribution to *A Christian View of History?*³ C.T. McIntire of the Institute for Christian Studies of Toronto also expressed his dissatisfaction with Dooyeweerd's inclusion of history in his

modality encyclopedia. More recently, John Van Dyk, my colleague in history and philosophy at Dordt College, has acceded to the idea that history should be extricated from the place Dooyeweerd has given it among the modalities and should be reassigned to serve its rightful integrative function.

With the emancipation of history from its modal bondage, so to speak, we are able to enlarge its freedom. That means that its responsibilities are also increased. If it is to be integrative, it will have to be integrative from some specific perspective. That raises the question, "Whose perspective?" In answer to that question, I want to insist that all historians should concede that they work from a chosen perspective. If so, then objectivity is only a cherished myth; if in no other way, one's perspective creeps in through the facts which one chooses to include or ignore.

Three General Perspectives

At the risk of oversimplification, I want to suggest that there are three general perspectives on history which, from time to time, separately or simultaneously, have dominated opinions as to the meaning and the general direction of history. There is the cyclic view, ancient and modern, which looks at history as moving in endless circles of repetition with only limited time spans of meaning. A variety of modern secular views makes history a kind of linear continuum, moving from an unspecified beginning into an indeterminate future. These secular views have a wide divergence, running the gamut from high optimism to extreme pessimism and nihilism. Segregated from the first two by its transcendent reference is the Christian view. It sees history as linear movement from a specific beginning to a decisive ending.

In this writing I will limit the discussion to problems relating to a Christian view of history.

The Need for a Clarification of the Designation "Christian"

In a 1973 article in *Fides et Historia*,⁴ entitled "The Problem of the Christian Interpretation of History," W. Stanford Reid took to task some fellow members of the Conference on Faith and History because they carried on an extended discussion of the problems relating to a Christian perspective on history without first coming to an understanding of the essentials of the Christian faith.⁵ That lack of clarification proved to be a fatal flaw because, as it turned out, men like Toynbee, Tillich and Bultmann were included in the roster of Christian historians in spite of their doubtful theological credentials.

The same lack of definition, for which Reid criticized the participants in the *Fides et Historia* discussion, also detracts from the general usefulness of C.T. McIntire's book, *God, History and Historians: Modern Christian Views of History*. McIntire's work is a useful anthology of perspectives on history by a number of notables in history, philosophy and theology. McIntire introduces each man's work with a short resumé but without critical comment. The writings of men like Toynbee, Tillich and Bultmann are sandwiched in between those whose perspective is solidly Christian. Such a loose use of the term tends to make the category "Christian" so ill defined that in sum McIntire's work does little to further the cause of Christian critical scholarship. This leaves me with the hope that McIntire will put a little more critical evaluation into a work which he now has in prospect, under the title *Seven Views of History*.⁶

Basic Christian Doctrines

Secular scholars generally deny any taint of dogma. By so doing, they refuse to recognize their hidden presuppositions as dogma. They feel that any suggestion of dogma would discredit their credibility as scholars. As I have indicated elsewhere,⁷ I do not believe that a Christian scholar's first responsibility is to uphold the canons of the secular critical method. For the Christian, obedient scholarship comes before critical scholarship. For the Christian historian as scholar, that implies accepting some basic biblical doctrines as the foundation for his work. At the least, these would include the doctrines of creation, the fall, and redemption as they encompass the history of man from its beginning to the second coming of Christ. In what follows, I will discuss these doctrines and some of the problems that relate to a Christian perspective on history.

Creation

If we are to have a biblical perspective on history, then we must begin our overview where the Bible does, at creation. Because the Bible is not a scientific account of the events, I think it is possible to have differences of opinion as to the meaning of the word "day" in the Genesis account. But, by contrast, if we mythologize the account, we then set the stage for mythologizing other events of paramount importance in the history of salvation. We then vitiate the biblical message and deprive it of its redemptive meaning.

The doctrine of creation firmly lays on man the need to relate his origins and his entire history to God as the transcendent source of his meaning. The doctrine of creation eliminates any possibility of competing gods. It

outlaws idolatry.⁸ The doctrine also invites us to examine more closely the relationship which the Creator maintains with his creation.

Providence

The Bible contains many references which indicate that God as Creator maintains an intimate relationship with his creation. There are many inexplicable aspects to that relationship. Because some of those aspects are shrouded in mystery, Reinhold Niebuhr said that it is impossible to formulate a philosophy of history. For Niebuhr, philosophy is concerned with making things rationally intelligible. God as transcendent eludes logical explanation, so we can have a theology of history but no philosophy of history. Be it philosophy or theology, the idea of providence helps us to confront the idea of God's involvement in human history. Niebuhr surely is right when he insists that "in proceeding to an exposition of the Christian interpretation of life and history, in comparison with the modern one, it is necessary to disavow the purpose of proving the Christian interpretation rationally compelling, in the sense that such a comparison could rationally force modern man to accept the Christian faith."⁹

Special or Remarkable Providences

By working out what they believed to be the manifestations of special providences, some Christians have attempted to trace out the meanings of God's hand in history in great detail. Some events were remarkable in that a clear association could be alleged between man's sin and God's punishments.

John Cotton, the eminent Puritan leader of early eighteenth century

Boston, devoted one of the books of his *Magnalia* to the "remarkable providences" which occurred in Boston in his time. Cotton accepted the natural law idea which came out of the Newtonian revolution in physics. This meant that there had to be some accommodation between the mechanics of natural law and the special intervention of God. Cotton Mather, John Cotton's grandson, explained special providence as follows: "A special providence is a natural event which serves as a judgment on human conduct. The special providence is not a miracle, because it is the result of secondary causes and so lies within the ordinary framework of nature, but God has so ordered the secondary causes that this event will follow upon a particular human act and serve as a divine judgment upon it."¹⁰

In our day, people in the Christian community often label "providential," that is, as special providences, those events which according to their particular meaning and purposes are especially for their good as they perceive it at the moment. A narrow escape from an auto accident is thought of as a providential rescue. Perhaps, because we tend to be less judgmental than the Puritans, we do not relate our daily highway casualties to the morality of the victims.

Holding up those events which we deem beneficent as signally "providential" complicates and confuses the doctrine of providence. It creates insoluble moral problems. How do we then explain the fatalities? Jesus' comments concerning the eighteen in Jerusalem on whom the tower of Siloam fell should warn us against making the victims of accidental or natural disasters "sinners above all men" in the locality where the event occurred. We may add that though the Puritans did assess moral blame

and reckoned some events as punishment, their adaptation of Newton did not compromise their belief in the sovereignty of God. According to Puritan theology, God exercises his sovereignty according to his "arbitrary will." This was their way of saying that God is not bound by natural law but can exercise choice freely.

Miracles

The problem of miracles has been the focal point of contention among historians, particularly between Christian and non-Christian historians. David Hume, the Scottish skeptical philosopher, is representative of the secular mind as to miracles. Though the miracles of the Bible in some cases were attested to by scores of people, Hume dismisses that testimony as unreliable. Such testimony represents "a passion for surprise and wonder" on the part of "ignorant and barbarous nations."¹¹ Primitive people have an inclination to confuse the ordinary and the extraordinary.

C. S. Lewis has countered Hume's argument by showing that the people who attested to miracles, as reported in the Bible, were fully aware of the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Ordinarily waters do not pile up at river crossings to let people pass over "dry shod." Axe heads do not float, and it takes more than a few loaves and fishes to feed five thousand people. In our day some Christians expect the extraordinary as they associate it with faith healing. For them, too, the extraordinary is reckoned as miracle and defies explanation in terms of natural or scientific laws.

In John 20:30, 31 and Acts 2:22, we read that, in addition to being accepted as authentic history, miracles were

given an authenticating function. They were proof of the fact that God had come into history through the Incarnation as the culminating redirection of history as promised already in Genesis 3:15. If miracles fall into disrepute under the scrutiny of scientific inspection, then the whole history of salvation becomes disreputable. Without the shedding of the blood (an historical event) there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). "If Christ be not raised [a miracle taking place in the course of human history], your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17).

Immanence, Transcendence or What?

There are some scholars in the Reformed community who so emphasize the dynamic character of God's relationship to his creation that they want to place the onus of scholasticism on all attempts at conceptual clarity concerning the Creator-creature relationship.¹² Those critics play down the propositional character of the biblical revelation. To my mind, nothing is gained by putting cognitive explanations under suspicion of scholasticism and then substituting something as vague as law-word as a kind of intermediate reality between God and his creation. Vacuity by itself is not a hedge against the dangers which traditional explanations presumably have inherited from the Greek vocabulary with which the discussion has traditionally been carried on.

Traditionally, when one wished to indicate that there is a discontinuity between God and his creation, the word "transcendence" indicated that God is the Transcendent One. God is not to be identified with his creation. To do so would approach pantheism. To indicate that God is not completely removed from his creation one can use the word

"immanence." By so doing, one indicates that God is in providential control of his creation. To deny this moment-to-moment control is to loosen God's relationship to his creation in the direction of deism and a mechanistic view of the universe, a real danger since the modern subscription to a mechanistic view received its impetus from the Newtonian revolution in physics.

I believe that one should be able to use some of the traditional terms without coming under suspicion of harboring some residual scholasticism. The use of natural and supernatural need not imply a dualistic ontology. Those carrying on the discussion under a variety of terms generally have the same ontological reality in mind. The semantic problem of having an unsatisfactory label for the referent does not necessarily imply unbiblical ideas as to the operation of God's providence. And to obliterate distinctions does not increase clarity.

In order to promote the dynamic character of God's providence and to erase the distinction between natural and supernatural, some want to broaden the concept of miracle to include such natural events as human birth. But then it turns out to be the case that if everything is a miracle nothing is a miracle. While such an enlargement of the concept may emphasize the mystery of human life, it is not what the writers of the biblical narrative had in mind when they referred to some event as miraculous.¹³

I think we can say that understanding history is a matter of understanding in some measure the dynamics of God's providential activity in his creation as it concerns man. But a mere rehearsal of those events does not explain their meaning. The disciples, as no one else, witnessed the mighty acts of God that were associated with the In-

carnation. Yet they were slow to understand. They had to have the meaning more fully explained. They were a part of the history of salvation which was taking place in their day, but they had to have some lessons in the theology which was the basis for that history (Cf. John 10:30). While the purpose of the biblical account is to lead disciples to a confessional life, the moment of initial confession often requires discursive theology as was the case with the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27 ff.).

Purpose in History

In the Old Testament history of Israel, the relationship between sin and punishment was often stunningly direct. From the book of Nahum we learn that Assyria was used by God to punish Israel for its idolatry. We are also told that Assyria on that account is not absolved from moral responsibility for the cruelty and rapine which she inflicted on the nations which she conquered, Israel and her semitic neighbors. From Nahum we learn something about God's purposes with respect to the warfare of Nahum's day.

A survey of history since the close of the biblical canon does not give us a clear indication of God's purposes in relation to the history of nations. No doubt, there are many in our century besides the victims who have asked, "Why did God allow the Nazi holocaust to take place?" For many it was a severe test of their faith in God's provident care. Jesus' comments concerning those who were victims of the tower of Siloam, previously referred to, should warn us against taking that history as an occasion for moralizing. We should not conclude that the Jews of Germany were in need of special chastisement because of special sins.

The Fall

I have already taken account of the need to reckon the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus as actual occurrences in the course of human history. I must also make mention of the Fall, because there are many modern theologians who want to reckon the Fall as myth along with the rest of the account of man's beginnings in Genesis 1-3. The myth of the Fall accounts for the fact *that* man now finds himself in an "ambiguous" moral situation. It does not explain *how*. To my mind, such a renovation of the biblical account is not a demythologizing of the Bible as Rudolph Bultmann would have it but a mythologizing. Concerning the account in Genesis, Karl Barth says, "Adam means simply man."¹⁴ And then, "It is not history but saga which can tell us that he (man) came into being in this way and existed as one who came into being in this way The biblical saga tells us that world history began with the pride and fall of man."¹⁵

Neo-orthodox theologians have often been praised and sometimes followed because of their recognition of man's Fall. Such an emphasis is considered a necessary response to the groundless optimism which characterized liberal theology for the first half of the twentieth century. Be that as it may, we should not lose sight of the fact that by taking the crucial events associated with the history of salvation out of actual history the neo-orthodox theologians vitiate the biblical message. The account then becomes an existential-dialectic and/or ontological typology. Karl Barth would be an example of the former and Paul Tillich of the latter.¹⁶

The account of the Fall should prevent the Christian historian from becoming unduly optimistic concerning

the future prospects of mankind. The biblical account should lead us to expect no improvement in man's basic nature. While not discounting God's conserving grace, the Christian historian cannot expect beatitude to come through any evolutionary or cultural process.

Biblical guidance should also keep the Christian historian from becoming unduly pessimistic or nihilistic. Though fallen, man is the object of God's saving love. There is meaning for life and history, though not through man in and by himself. Moreover, when saving grace does its work, it touches more than just the individual. It should have a salutary effect on society as a whole.

History and the Antithesis

Those who hold a strictly secular view of life do not like to think in terms of any kind of segregation on the basis of religion. The pleasure principle by which many people live has no room for any either/or choices. It embraces a both/and philosophy. One can both have his cake and eat it too. John Dewey is pre-eminent among those who abhorred the kind of theology which has a "sheep and goats" kind of antithesis. For Dewey, one's history is his weal or woe and not a course which is decisive in relation to some future sorting out. Dewey saw history as a process, but one in which man could work for the "amelioration" of his own condition. The reasonable use of science would help bring about improvement. Growth is one's measure of value.

Twentieth century theologians like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Hans Küng, all in their own ways, have robbed history of its significance in relation to the antithesis. If one subscribes to one or another of the forms of universalism proposed by these men, then all men

are brought into the Kingdom eventually. If the kerygma stands outside of the course of regular history, then the religious direction of our lives has no transcendent reference. And again, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (I Cor. 15:17).

History and Futurology

The Christian view of history is unique in that it holds to a second coming of Christ as the termination of the linear course of history. The belief in the "eschaton," as it is often called, is the basis for an eschatology, a doctrine of last things. Even as there can be no Christian metaphysics which does not come from the Bible, there can be no reliable information about the future except by biblical revelation. Unfortunately, what the Bible gives us concerning the future is subject to a wide divergence of interpretation.

Protestant Fundamentalists, armed with their Scofield Bibles, have divided history into numerous dispensations, from creation to the present. Their premillennialism seems to give them insights into the future which Christians with divergent eschatologies are not privy to. The use of allegory, analogy, typology, and literalism when it suits, coupled with a lively imagination, has made it possible for some in the Christian community to capitalize on an excessive preoccupation with the future by many Christians. One need only call to mind the phenomenal sales success of Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*.¹⁷ Others, like Carl McIntire, try to hasten the playing out of their premillennial scenario by lending support to Israeli Zionism in such crises as the Yom Kippur War.

Needless to say, historians who stand in the Reformed tradition of

amillennialism cannot lay claim to any special expertise with which to beguile an inordinately curious readership. I think such historians should also avoid any postmillennial illusions concerning a completed and perfected Kingdom here and now. The coming of the Kingdom and the "eschaton" give significance to the course of history now and those events which presage its culmination, but "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt. 24:36). Holding only a limited perspective on the future, the Christian historian, like believers everywhere, is well advised to "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

History as Apologetics

John Warwick Montgomery is eminent among those evangelicals who believe that objective history constitutes the best apology for the truth of the Christian message. He lumps such diverse thinkers as Cornelius Van Til and Karl Barth together into the category of fideistic presuppositionalists. According to Montgomery, fideists are involved in the fallacy of question-begging. They accept on faith the very premises they are supposed to prove. While Van Til would strongly object to the fideist label, Montgomery would agree with Van Til's criticisms of Barth's conversion of biblical history into saga. It is as regular and reliable history in the scientific and secular sense of the word that Montgomery expects the Bible to do its apologetic task.

The case for the Bible "rests solely and squarely upon historical method, the kind of method all of us, whether Christians, rationalists, agnostics, or Tibetan monks, have to use in analyzing

historical data."¹⁸ Montgomery, apparently, refuses to acknowledge that he has faith in the empirical-rational method of investigation so trusted by secular scientism. He is reasserting the reliability of the scientific method while others in the Christian community are deserting it.¹⁹

The problem with Montgomery's approach is that it proves too much. If the Bible proves itself reliable on the basis of the commonly accepted empirical-rational method, then it ought to be completely acceptable to the secular mind which endorses that method. Obviously, that is not the case. As was the case with C.S. Lewis, who had some sympathy for the kind of argument Montgomery offers, it was not until "God closed in" that the biblical account spoke to his heart.

Several members of the Conference on Faith and History brought Montgomery's thesis under discussion in their publication, *Fides et Historia* prior to the Fall issue of 1974. In that issue, Earl William Kennedy, Professor of Religion at Northeastern College, reviewed the reviews of Montgomery's position. In disagreement with Montgomery, Kennedy concludes: "Therefore, 'the particular historic events of the Christian faith' provide only a 'necessary ground of belief' but cannot in and of themselves, that is, apart from the internal work of God's Spirit, provide the 'sufficient eyes' by which the unbeliever—certainly without excuse in any case—can 'see' the truth of the New Testament witness, to the extent that he will trust in Christ."²⁰

I think we must conclude that because many of the disputed events of the biblical account are attested to fully as well as those regularly accepted in secular history, it is not a case of head but heart. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus implies that those

who refuse to listen to Moses and the prophets will not believe were they to be sent a celestial messenger. That also fortifies Kennedy's point, that the bias of unbelief is not excused by one's bias for scientific method. When so used, the method must be reckoned as one of the many subterfuges which men have chosen to excuse themselves in their unbelief.

As a matter of trust, Christians take God as their point of reference from the start. Even so, if they think at all, they must at times be driven to the point of formulating a theodicy, that is, formulating "a vindication of the justice of God, especially in ordaining and permitting natural and moral evil."

History and Theodicy

The philosopher Immanuel Kant took the moral imperative, the feeling of obligation towards that which is right, as a basic fact of human life. From that reality Kant inferred the existence of moral freedom, immortality and God. For Kant, God eventually had to be brought into the moral picture as a kind of croupier who is powerful enough to balance the chance games of the universe, if not in time then in eternity. Hence also the need for immortality. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus illustrates the idea Kant had in mind.

Present injustice demands eventual redress.

As a matter of trust, Christians take God as their point of reference from the start. Even so, if they think at all, they must at times be driven to the point of formulating a theodicy, that is, formulating "a vindication of the justice of God, especially in ordaining and permitting natural and moral evil." That problem was the crux of Job's questions. Often, it is only after periods of great anguish of body and mind that Christians can join Job in saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

Atheists, agnostics and others, like Thomas Jefferson and John Locke, have tried to modify Christian theism to meet the requirements of their rationalism. They see a disparity in the Christian claim that God is both good and omnipotent. They argue that one cannot logically hold to both ideas. To their way of thinking, if God is both good and all powerful, he would have both the desire and the ability to prevent suffering by the innocent. To prove that God does not exercise both omnipotence and beneficence, such detractors give as evidence a small child struck down by leukemia or thousands killed by some natural disaster.

Alvin Plantinga, Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, has taken up the task of proving that, with respect to the problem of theodicy, logic is not on the side of the unbeliever. In a chapter on "The Problem of Evil" in his book, *God And Other Minds*, Plantinga concludes that "The atheologist's only recourse at this point (that is, at the end of the argument) is to claim 'no case of severe, protracted, involuntary, human pain is ever outweighed by any good state of affairs' though not analytical, is, nonetheless, necessarily true."²¹ In other words, the atheist does not hold

his position on the basis of logic but as the necessary outcome of his unbelief.

By secular standards, what happens in one's life, which is one's history, comes about mostly by chance. It is usually judged to be good or evil on the basis of some private or popular standard of value. In contrast to all secular views, there is a theodicy succinctly wrapped up in Romans 8:28, where we read, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." And by implication this verse contains a doctrine of providence, antithesis and an eschatology.

Presentism

Carl Becker, the noted American historian, suggested that every man be his own historian. That means everyone must be concerned to establish some meaning for his life here and now. There are historians who argue in favor of "presentism" as a kind of canon for the interpretation of history. For example, David L. Hull, by way of an article "In Defense of Presentism" in *History and Theory*, argues that while he agrees with Murray G. Murphey that "we should try to understand the past in its own terms" we must, nonetheless, judge the past by our present state of knowledge and methods of research. Hull then offers a crucial example. He writes, "Christians have traditionally maintained that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. The historian must surely take note of these beliefs, but he is also warranted in looking for the biological father. He has every right to believe that virgin births were no more common two thousand years ago than they are today."²²

From the above, Christian historians would have to conclude that

any kind of "presentism" to which they could subscribe would be heavily under the influence of biblical dogmas set down in the past and would be freighted with the biblical perspective with respect to the future. That is the same as to say what I said earlier, that the Christian historian must be more concerned to uphold obedient scholarship than critical scholarship, secularly construed. If that means some loss of standing among academicians generally, there are compensations. As Christian scholars "we now see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face." And then the secular historian will have his present confusion compounded unto all eternity.

Notes

¹See my "Dooyeweerd's 'history' and the Historian," *Pro Rege*, 2, No. 1 (Dec. 1973), 38.

²Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretic Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955), I, 28.

³C.T. McIntire, "The Ongoing Task of Christian Historiography," in *A Christian View of History?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 67.

⁴W. Stanford Reid, "The Problem of the Christian Interpretation of History," *Fides et Historia*, 5, Nos. 1-2 (Spring 1973), 96.

⁵For the earlier discussion, see *Fides et Historia*, 4, No. 1 (Fall 1971), 4 ff.

⁶*Perspective*, Newsletter of the AACS, 13, Nos. 1-2 (March-April 1979), 4.

⁷See my "Academic Orientation at Dordt," *Pro Rege*, 4, No. 2 (Dec. 1975), 4 ff.

⁸Cf. Romans 1:20; also the *Belgic Confession*, Article II.

⁹Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 101.

¹⁰Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 228 ff.

¹¹David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sec. X, Part II.

¹²Herman Dooyeweerd; see his "Cornelius Van Til and the Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought," *Jerusalem and Athens* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971).

In this writing Dooyeweerd asserts:

That the Word-revelation was from the beginning mediated to man through human language is naturally unquestionable. But that verbal language would necessarily signify conceptual thought-contents is a rationalist prejudice that runs counter to the real state of affairs (p. 84).

To my mind Dooyeweerd does not accurately assess the state of affairs as it relates to verbal communication, which is the form of biblical communication. Whenever divine revelation is communicated, it has to go beyond personal mystic experience. It has to use commonly understood words. Those words have to be based on commonly shared concepts and feelings. Even when it is mostly feeling that is to be shared, commonly shared concepts are needed. Dooyeweerd offers elliptical expressions and expletives as forms of nonconceptual communication. They hardly prove the point. If I say, "Wonderful" I mean "It is wonderful" no matter how enthusiastically I say it. As to expletives, if I yell "Ouch," my hearer will have to have some conception of pain in order to get my meaning. Without conceptualization there is no intelligible communication by means of language.

¹³On the basis of his doctoral thesis, *Philosophy and Scripture* (Marlton, N.J.: Mack Publishing Co., 1978), I find myself in disagreement with my colleague, John Vander Stelt. He maintains that discussions of the relationship of God and his creation in terms of transcendence and immanence, continuity and discontinuity, as well as natural and supernatural, are "questionable (from a biblical perspective) problems" (p. 268). Throughout it is evident that Vander Stelt follows the lead of his mentor, G.C. Berkhouwer, in his assessment as to what is biblical. But to assume *ipso facto* that Berkhouwer's emphasis is the biblical approach is to beg the question.

Vander Stelt accounts for the "peculiar" method of theology used by the Princeton-Westminster apologists as generated by the influence of the intellectualistic and rationalistic influence of their time. Similarly, one can allege that the Barth-Berkhouwer emphasis comes out of "peculiar" existential-subjectivistic emphasis which has dominated Protestant theology since it came under the influence of Kierkegaard. In the absence of convincing proof that the later emphasis is more biblical, the matter of "biblical" remains a moot question.

As a footnote to this endnote, let me add that I believe Vander Stelt's view of the Westminster apologetic is impaired by time and distance. Had he been here to view the development of Christian Reformed theology and philosophy from 1935 to 1955, I think he would have come away with a different assessment. Vander Stelt could then have noticed that the predominant Christian Reformed approach to philosophy at that time was rationalistic, that is, basically scholastic. From that perspective, the Westminster apologetic was criticized for its rejection of the idea of "brute facts" and the old scholastic proofs for the existence of God. At that time the Westminster position was rejected as a fideism.

It is only since the pendulum swing of theology in the direction of subjectivity and existentialism, set loose by the influence of Barth, that the Westminster position has been characterized as intellectualistic and rationalistic along with that of Princeton. But stretching out the Westminster apologetic, Procrustean fashion, on the framework set up for that of Princeton, has to be reckoned as a "tour de force."

¹⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956) IV, 507.

¹⁵Barth, p. 508.

¹⁶John Warwick Montgomery, "Barth's 'Heilsgeschichte,'" in *Where Is History Going* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 108.

¹⁷Cf. Frank Roberts, "Introduction," *A Christian View of History?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 11.

¹⁸Montgomery, p. 53.

¹⁹Nick Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 62. Wolterstorff quite rightly abandons the old foundationalism which was based on the idea of a common ground established by reason. He also rejects any biblical foundationalism because we do not have access to the autographa of the biblical text. Wolterstorff chooses a kind of subjective leap of faith as the route to a foundation for theory, that is, for science. To my mind, what he newly embraces is no better than what he lately abandoned. See my discussion under the title, "The Foundations of Science," in *Pro Rege*, 6, No. 2 (Dec. 1977), 8 ff.

²⁰Earl William Kennedy, "The Reviewer Reviews the Review of the Reviewer's Review," *Fides Et Historia*, 7, No. 1 (Fall 1974), 35.

²¹Alvin Plantinga, "The Problem of Evil," in *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 13.

²²David Hull, "In Defense of Presentism," *History and Theory*, 18, No. 1 (1979), 13.