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-Theodore Plantinga

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What Is Man?

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THE question, "What is man?" occupies a central place in contemporary European thinking. This question is certainly not new. After every period in the history of

Western thought, in which all interest was concentrated upon the knowledge of the outer world, the immense universe, man began to feel dissatisfied. In this situation human reflection always turns again to the central riddle of man's own existence. As soon as this riddle begins to puzzle human thought, it seems as if the external world recedes from the focus of interest.

In one of his splendid dialogues Plato pictures his master Socrates as a man obsessed with but one aim in his search for wisdom, namely, to know himself. As long as I have not succeeded in knowing myself, said Socrates, I have no time for meddling with other questions that seem to me trifles when compared with this.

In contemporary European thinking, however, the question, "What is man?", is no longer asked from a merely theoretical viewpoint. Much rather it has become a crucial issue for many thinkers because of the spiritual distress of Western society and the fundamental crisis of our culture. It may be that in America this crisis does not occupy the same central place in the reflection of the leading thinkers as it does in Europe. Nevertheless, America, too, is concerned with the same problem, since it belongs to the sphere of Western civilization.

What, then, is the character of this crisis? And why does the question, "What is man?", today sound like a cry of distress?

The crisis of Western civilization is depicted as a complete decline of human personality, as the rise of the mass-man. This is attributed, by different leading thinkers, to the increasing supremacy of technology and to the over-organization of modern society. The result, supposedly, is a process of depersonalizing of contemporary life. The modern mass-man has lost all personal traits. His pattern of behaviour is prescribed by what is done in general. He shifts the responsibility for his behaviour on to an impersonal society. And this society, in turn, seems to be ruled by the robot, the electronic brain, by bureaucracy, fashion,

organization, and other impersonal powers. As a result, our contemporary society has no room for human personality, or for a real spiritual communion of person with person. Even the family and the church often can no longer guarantee a sphere of personal intercourse. Family life is, to a large degree, dislocated by increasing industrialization. The church itself is confronted with the danger of the depersonalization of congregational life, especially in the big cities.

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In addition, the average, secularized man nowadays has lost any and all true interest in religion. He has fallen prey to a state of spiritual nihilism, that is, he negates all spiritual values. He has lost all his faith, and denies any higher ideals than the satisfaction of his appetites. Even the humanistic faith in *mankind*, and in the power of human reason to rule the world and to elevate man to a higher level of freedom and morality, has no longer any appeal to the mind of the present-day mass-man. To him God is dead, and the two world wars have destroyed the humanistic ideal of man. This modern man has lost *himself*, and considers himself cast into a world that is meaningless, that offers no hope for a better future.

Western civilization, which displays these terrible symptoms of spiritual decline, finds itself confronted with the totalitarian ideology of Communism. This it tries to oppose with the old ideas of democracy, freedom, and inalienable human rights. But these ideas, too, have been involved in the spiritual crisis, which has sapped their very fundamentals. In earlier times, it is argued, they were rooted both in the Christian faith and in the humanist's faith in reason. But the increasing relativism which has affected our Western civilization has left no room for a strong faith, since it has destroyed the belief in absolute truth. The traditional faith, which gave man his inspiration, has to a large extent

been replaced by technical methods and organization. And in general it is due to such impersonal means that the traditional Christian and the humanistic traits of our culture are outwardly maintained.

But Western civilization cannot be saved by technical and organizational means alone. The Communistic world-power, whose ideology is still rooted in a strong faith, also has these means at its disposal, and has used them very well. Besides, the atomic bomb, which terminated the second world war, is no longer an American monopoly. This terrible invention of Western technology can only increase the fear of the impending ruin of our culture. The amazing technical development of Western society, which has produced the modern mass-man, will also destroy our civilization unless a way is found to restore human personality.

SPIRITUAL CRISIS

It is against this background of spiritual distress that the question "What is man?" has become truly existential in contemporary European philosophy. It is no longer merely a question of theoretical interest. It has become, rather, a question concerning the whole existence of man in his spiritual anxiety. It is a question of to be or not to be. This also explains the powerful influence of contemporary personalistic and existentialistic philosophical trends upon European literature and upon youth. Here it is no longer an abstract idealistic image of man as a rational and moral being which is at issue. Rather, the new philosophical view of man is concerned with man in his concrete situation in the world,

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with his state of decay as the contemporary mass-man, and with the possibilities of his rediscovering himself as a responsible personality.

This philosophy no longer considers the intellect as the real centre of human nature. It has tried to penetrate, rather, to what it conceived to be the deepest root of human selfhood and the deepest cause of man's spiritual distress. Man is thrown into the world involuntarily. To sustain his life he is obliged to turn to the things that are at hand in his world. The struggle for existence characterizes man's life. But, in this situation of concern, man is in danger of losing himself as a free personality so that he delivers himself to the world. For the human selfhood surpasses all existing things. The human ego is free; it is not at hand as a concrete object. It is able to project its own future, and to say to its past: "I am no longer what I was yesterday. My future is still in my own hand. I can change myself. I can create my future by my own power". But when man reflects on this creative freedom of his selfhood he is confronted with the deepest cause of his distress, namely, the anxiety and fear of death. Death is not here understood in the merely biological sense, in which it also applies to the animal, but much rather in the sense of the dark nothingness, the night without dawn, which puts an end to all human projects and makes them meaningless. This anxiety, this fear of death, is usually suppressed, for such is the mass-man's depersonalized manner of existence. To arrive at a proper, personal existence, man should frankly, and by anticipation, confront himself with death as the nothingness which limits his freedom. He should realize that his freedom is a freedom unto death, ending in the darkness of nothingness. Thus this first existentialistic approach to human self-knowledge revealed a profoundly pessimistic view of man.

Other existentialistic thinkers, however, showed a more hopeful possibility of rediscovering man's true personality. In accordance with the personalistic philosophy

of Martin Buber, they pointed to the essential communal relation in our personal life. You and I are correlates which presuppose each other. I cannot know myself without taking into account that my ego is related to the ego of my fellow-man. And I cannot really have a personal meeting with another ego without love. It is only by such a meeting in love that I can arrive at true self-knowledge and knowledge of my fellow-man.

In this way, then, this philosophy seemed to offer various perspectives for a more profound knowledge of man's selfhood. And there are also many theologians who are of the opinion that this existentialistic approach to the central problem of man's nature and destiny is of a more biblical character than the traditional theological view of human nature, which is oriented to ancient Greek philosophy.

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I fear that this theological opinion testifies to a lack of self-knowledge in its radical biblical sense. It will presently appear why I think so.

First, however, let us establish that the whole preceding diagnosis of the spiritual crisis of Western civilization fails to lay bare the root of the evil. For the symptoms [TP: symtoms in original] of the spiritual decadence of this civilization, manifesting themselves in an increasing expansion of the nihilistic mind, cannot be explained by external causes.

They are only the ultimate result of a religious process of apostasy, which started with the belief in the absolute self-sufficiency of the rational human personality and was doomed to end with the breaking down of this idol. How, then, can we arrive at a real self-knowledge? The question: "Who is man?" contains a mystery that cannot be explained by man himself.

THE SCIENTIFIC VIEW

In the last century, when the belief in so-called objective science was still predominant in the leading circles, it was supposed that by continued empirical research science would succeed in solving all the problems of human existence. Now there is, doubtless, a scientific way of acquiring knowledge about human existence. There are many special sciences which are concerned with the study of man. But each of them considers human life only from a particular viewpoint or aspect. Physics and chemistry, biology, psychology, history, sociology, jurisprudence, ethics, and so on, all can furnish interesting information about man. But when one asks them: "What is man himself, in the central unity of his existence, in his selfhood?", then these sciences have no answer. The reason is that they are bound to the temporal order of our experience. Within this temporal order human existence presents a great diversity of aspects, just like the whole temporal world in which man finds himself placed. Physics and chemistry inform us about the material constitution of the human body and the electro-magnetic forces operating in it; biology lays bare the functions of our organic life; psychology gives us an insight into the emotional life of feeling and will, and has even penetrated to the unconscious sphere of our mind. History informs us about the development of human culture, linguistics about the human faculty of expressing thoughts and feelings by means of words and other symbolic signs; economics and jurisprudence study the economic and juridical aspects of human social life, and so on. Thus every special science studies temporal human existence in one of its different aspects.

But all these aspects of our experience and existence within the order of time are related to the central unity of our consciousness, which we call our *I*, our ego. *I* experience, and *I* exist, and this *I* surpasses the diversity of aspects which human life displays within

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the temporal order. The ego is not to be determined by any aspect of our temporal existence, since it is the central reference point of *all* of them. If man lacked this central *I* he could not have any experience at all.

Consequently, contemporary existentialistic philosophy has rightly posited that it is not possible to acquire real self-knowledge by means of scientific research. But it has pretended that its own philosophical approach to human existence does lead us to this self-knowledge. Science, so it says, is restricted to the investigation of what is given, to concrete objects at hand. But the human ego is not a given object. It has the freedom to create itself by contriving its own future. Existentialistic philosophy pretends that it is exactly directed upon the discovery of the freedom of the human *I*, in contrast to all the data at hand in the world.

But is it true that we can arrive at real self-knowledge in this way? Can this philosophy penetrate to the real centre and root of our existence, as many contemporary theologians think? I am of the opinion that it is a vain illusion to think so.

Philosophical thought is bound to the temporal order of human experience, just as the special sciences are. Within this temporal order man's existence presents itself only in a rich diversity of aspects, but not in that radical and central unity which we call our *I* or selfhood. It is true that our temporal existence presents itself as an individual, bodily whole, and that its different aspects are related to this whole, in fact, are only aspects of it. But as a merely temporal wholeness our human existence does not display that central unity which we are aware of in our self-consciousness.

This central *I*, which surpasses the temporal order, remains a veritable mystery. As soon as we try to grasp it in a concept or definition it recedes like a phantom and

resolves itself into nothingness. Is it really a nothing, as some philosophers have said?

THE HUMAN EGO

The mystery of the human I is that it is, indeed, nothing *in itself*; that is to say, it is nothing as long as we try to conceive it apart from the three central relations which alone give it meaning.

First, our human ego is related to our whole temporal existence and to our entire experience of the temporal world as the central reference point of the latter. Second, it finds itself, indeed, in an essential communal relation to the egos of its fellow-men. Third, it points beyond itself to its central relation to its divine Origin in whose image man was created.

The first relation, namely, that of the human ego to the temporal order of the world in which we are placed, cannot lead us to real self-knowledge so long as it is viewed in itself alone. The

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temporal order of human life in the world, with its diversity of aspects, can only turn away our view from the real centre of human existence, so long as we seek to know *ourselves* from it. Shall we seek our selfhood in the spatial aspect of our temporal existence, or in the physico-chemical aspect of the material constitution of our body, or in the aspect of its organic life, or in that of emotional feeling? Or should we rather identify our ego with the logical aspect of our thought, or with the historical aspect of our cultural life in a temporal society, or with the aesthetic, or moral, aspect of our temporal existence? By so doing we would lose sight of the real centre and radical unity of our human nature. The temporal order of our experiential world is like a prism which refracts or disperses the sunlight into a rich diversity

of colours. None of these colours is the light itself. In the same way the central human ego is not to be determined by *any* of the different aspects of our temporal, earthly existence.

The second relation in which our selfhood is to be conceived is the communal relation of our own ego to that of our fellow-man. This relation can no more lead us to real self-knowledge than can the relation of our ego to the temporal world, as long as it is viewed in itself alone. The reason is that the ego of our fellow-man confronts us with the same riddle as our own selfhood does. So long as we try to understand the relation between you and me merely from the temporal order of this earthly human existence we must posit that this relation presents the same diversity of aspects as our own temporal existence. Whether we conceive of it in its moral, psychological, historico-cultural, or biological aspects, we will not arrive at any knowledge of the central relationship between your and my selfhood. By so doing we only lose sight of its central character, which surpasses the diversity of aspects in our temporal horizon of existence.

The personalistic and existentialistic views of man have tried to determine the I-thou relation as a relation of love, an inner meaning of the human persons. But within the earthly horizon of time even the love-relations present a diversity of meaning and typical character. Does one refer to the love between husband and wife, or between parents and their children? Or is it the love-relation between fellow-believers, belonging to inter-related Reformed churches, that we have in mind? Or is it perhaps the love-relation between compatriots, who have in common the love of their country? Or have we rather in mind the general love of one's neighbour in the moral relations of our temporal life? None of these temporal communal relations touches at the central sphere of our selfhood.

And when contemporary philosophy speaks of an inner meeting of the one person with the other we must ask,

"What do you understand by this inner meeting?" A real inner meeting presupposes

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real self-knowledge, and can only occur in the central religious sphere of our relation with our fellow-man. The temporal love-relations, in the above-mentioned diversity of aspects, cannot guarantee a true inner meeting. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them". Jesus here apparently speaks of a love that does not concern the real centre of our lives, but only the temporal relations between men in their earthly diversity. But how can we love our enemies and bless those who curse us, and pray for those who persecute us, if we do not love God in Jesus Christ?

Thus the inter-personal relation between you and me cannot lead us to real self knowledge, as long as it is not conceived in its central sense; and in this central sense it points beyond itself to the ultimate relation between the human I and God. This latter central relation is of a religious character. No philosophical reflection can lead us to real self-knowledge, in a purely philosophical way. The words with which Calvin starts the first chapter of his textbook on the Christian religion: "The true knowledge of ourselves is dependent on the true knowledge of God", are indeed the key to answer the question: "Who is man himself?"

But if that is so, it seems that we should appeal [TP: text says apply] to theology for real self-knowledge, since theology seems to be especially concerned with the knowledge of God. However, this too would amount to self-deceit, no less than in the other sciences. For, as a dogmatic science of the articles of the Christian faith, theology is no more able to lead us to real knowledge of ourselves and of God than philosophy and the special sciences which are

concerned with the study of man. This central knowledge can only be the result of the Word-revelation of God operating in the heart, in the religious centre of our existence, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ never blamed the scribes and Pharisees for their lack of dogmatic theological knowledge. When Herod asked the chief priests and scribes where Christ was to be born he received an answer that was doubtless correct from a dogmatic theological viewpoint, since it was based upon the prophetic texts of the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, Jesus says that they did not know Him nor His Father. And how could they have had real self-knowledge without this knowledge of God in Jesus Christ?

THE THEOLOGICAL VIEW

The traditional theological view of man, which we find in both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholastic works on dogmatics, was not at all of a biblical origin. According to this theological conception of human nature, man is composed of a mortal, material body and an immaterial, rational soul. These components were

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conceived of as united to one substance. Nevertheless, according to this view the rational soul continues to exist as an independent substance of the separation from the body, i.e., after death. In line with this view of human nature man was called a rational and moral being in contrast to the animal which lacks a rational soul.

This view of man was, indeed, taken from Greek philosophy, which sought the centre of our human existence in reason, i.e., in the intellect. But in this entire image of man there was no room for the real, i.e., the religious, centre of our existence which in the Holy Scripture is called our *heart*, the spiritual root of all the temporal manifestation of

our life. It was constructed apart from the central theme of the Word-revelation, that of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit. And it is this very core of the divine Revelation which alone reveals the true root and centre of human life. It is the only key to true self-knowledge in its dependency on the true knowledge of God. It is also the only judge both of all theological and philosophical views of man. As such, this central theme of the Word-revelation cannot be dependent on theological interpretations and conceptions, which are fallible human work, bound to the temporal order of our existence and experience. Its radical sense can only be explained by the Holy Spirit, who opens our hearts, so that our belief is no longer a mere acceptance of the articles of the Christian faith, but a living belief, instrumental to the central operation of God's Word in the heart, namely, the religious centre of our lives. And this operation does not occur in an individualistic way but in the ecumenical communion of the Holy Spirit who unites all the members of the true Catholic Church in its spiritual sense, irrespective of their temporal denominational divisions.

Naturally, creation, the fall into sin, and redemption through Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, are also articles of faith, which are treated in every theological dogmatics, in addition to other articles which are also, actually or supposedly, founded on the Holy Scriptures. But in their radical sense as the central theme of the Word-revelation and the key of knowledge they are not merely articles of faith, which are only the human formulations of the confession of the Church; much rather, they are the Word of God itself in its central spiritual power addressing itself to the *heart*, the religious core and centre of our existence. In this central confrontation with the Word of God man has nothing to give, but only to listen and to receive. God does not speak to theologians, philosophers, and scientists, but to sinners, lost in themselves, and made into children through the

operation of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. In this central and radical sense God's Word, penetrating to the root of our being, has

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to become the central motive-power of the whole of the Christian life within the temporal order with its rich diversity of aspects, occupational spheres, and tasks. As such, the central theme of creation, fall into sin, and redemption should also be the central starting point and motive-power of our theological and philosophical thought.

Is it necessary, at this point, to consider the radical meaning of this central theme of the divine Word-revelation? [TP: text says Word-relation] Is it not rather well known to all of us since the beginning of our Christian education?

It may well be questioned whether this is really true. I am afraid that many Christians have only a theological knowledge of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ, and that this central theme of the Word-revelation has not yet become the central motive-power of their lives.

THE BIBLICAL MEANING

What is the radical, biblical sense of the revelation of creation? As Creator, God reveals Himself as the absolute Origin of all that exists outside of Himself. There is no power in the world that is independent of Him. Even Satan is a creature and his power is taken from creation, namely, from the creation of man in the image of God. If man had not been created in God's image, Satan's suggestion that man would be like God would have had no power whatever over the human heart. He could only give this power an apostate direction, but his power does not originate from himself. If our heart finds itself fully in the grip of the self-revelation of God as Creator, we can no longer imagine that there could

exist a safe and neutral zone which is withdrawn from God. This is the fundamental difference between the living God and the idols which originate from an absolutization of what has only a relative and dependent existence. The ancient Greeks, whose conception of human nature had such a predominant influence upon the traditional theological view of man, worshipped their Olympian gods, who were merely deified cultural powers of Greek society. These gods were represented as invisible and immortal beings endowed with a splendid beauty and a superhuman power. But these splendid gods had no power over the fate of death, to which mortals are subjected. This is why the famous Greek poet, Homer, said: "Even the immortal gods cannot help lamentable man when the horrible fate of death strikes him down". And the same poet says that the immortal gods fight shy of every contact with the realm of death.

But hear now what Psalm 139 says about God: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there. If I make

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my bed in the realm of death, behold, Thou art there". Here we face the living God, as Creator, whom the ancient Greeks did not know.

In an indissoluble connection with this self-revelation as Creator, God has revealed man to Himself. Man was created in the image of God. Just as God is the absolute origin of all that exists outside of Himself, so He created man as a being in whom the entire diversity of aspects and faculties of the temporal world is concentrated within the religious centre of his existence, which we call our I, and which Holy Scripture calls our *heart* in a pregnant, religious sense. As the central seat of the image of God, the human selfhood was endowed with the innate religious impulse to concentrate his whole temporal life and the whole temporal

world upon the service of love to God. And since the love for God implies the love for His image in man, the whole diversity of God's temporal ordinances is related to the central, religious commandment of love, namely; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and mind, and thy neighbour as thyself". This is the radical biblical sense of the creation of man in the image of God. It leaves no room for any neutral sphere in life, which could be withdrawn from the central commandment in the kingdom of God.

Since the image of God in man concerned the radix, that is, the religious centre and root of our entire temporal existence, it follows that the fall into sin can only be understood in the same radical, biblical sense. The entire fall into sin can be summed up as a false illusion which arose in the human heart, namely; that the human I has the same absolute existence as God Himself. This was the false insinuation of Satan, to which man gave ear: "Ye shall be like God". This apostasy from the living God implied the spiritual death of man, since the human I is nothing in itself and can only live from the Word of God and in the love-communion with its divine Creator. However, this original sin could not destroy the religious centre of human existence with its innate religious impulse to seek for its absolute Origin. It could only lead this central impulsions in a false, apostate direction by diverting it to the temporal world with its rich diversity of aspects, which, however, have only a relative sense.

By seeking his God and himself in the temporal world, and by elevating a relative and dependent aspect of this world to the rank of the absolute, man fell prey to idolatry. He lost the true knowledge of God and true self-knowledge. The idea that true self-knowledge may be regained by an existentialistic philosophy apart from the divine Word-revelation, is nothing but the old vain illusion that the human I is something in itself, independent of God who has revealed Himself as the Creator.

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THE RELIGIOUS CENTRE

It is only in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word and Redeemer, that the image of God has been restored in the religious centre of human nature. The redemption by Jesus Christ in its radical biblical sense means the rebirth of our *heart* and must reveal itself in the whole of our temporal life. Consequently, there now can be no real self-knowledge apart from Jesus Christ. And this biblical self-knowledge implies that our whole world-and-life-view must be reformed in a christocentric sense; so that every dualistic view of common grace which separates the latter from its true religious root and centre in Jesus Christ should be rejected in principle.

The history of dogmatic theology proves that it is possible to give an apparently orthodox theoretical explanation of the articles of faith pertaining to the threefold central theme of Holy Scripture, without any awareness of the central and radical significance of the latter for the view of human nature and of the temporal world. In this case theological thought does not really find itself in the grip of the Word of God. The latter has not become its central basic motive, its central impelling force. Rather, it proves to be influenced by another, a non-biblical, central motive, which gives to it its ultimate direction.

Such was the scholastic theme of nature and grace (introduced into Roman Catholic theology and philosophy in the 13th century) which ruled the traditional theological view of man. It led scholastic theology to divide human life into two spheres, namely, the natural and the supernatural. Human nature was supposed to belong to the natural sphere, and was supposed to find its centre in natural reason. This human reason would be able to acquire a right insight into human nature, and into all other so-called

natural truths, apart from any divine revelation, by its own natural light alone.

Of course, it was granted that this rational nature of man was created by God. But this theological acceptance of creation as revealed truth did not influence the view of human nature itself. This view was much rather ruled by the dualistic pagan religious basic motive of Greek thought, which led to a so-called dichotomistic conception of the nature of man.

In addition to his rational-ethical nature, man was supposed to have been endowed with a supernatural gift of grace, namely, participation in the divine nature. According to Roman Catholic doctrine this supernatural gift of grace was lost by the fall into sin. It is regained by the supernatural means of grace, which Christ has entrusted to His Church. In this way the human rational nature would be elevated to that supernatural state of perfection to which it was destined according to the plan of creation. It was, however, granted that man cannot arrive at this state without faith, which is itself a gift of grace to the human intellect; it is, therefore,

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only by faith that we can accept the supernatural truths of divine revelation. But the supernatural sphere of grace presupposes the natural sphere of human life, namely, human nature. This nature, according to the Roman Catholic view, was not radically corrupted by sin; it was only wounded, since, according to the plan of creation, it was destined to be united with the supernatural gift of grace. As a result of original sin, human nature lost its original harmony. The sensuous inclinations are in opposition to natural reason which should rule over them. Nevertheless, man can arrive at the acquisition of natural virtues by the rule of reason over the sensuous inclinations is realized.

Only the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and Christian love belong to the sphere of grace.

This is the view of human nature which has been sanctioned by the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. It has completely abandoned the *radical* sense of creation, fall, and redemption, as they are revealed to us in the Word of God.

ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

The Roman Catholic view of this central theme of revelation was rejected by the Reformation. But how is it to be explained that the conception of human nature as a composite of a material body and an immortal, rational soul was, nevertheless, generally accepted by both scholastic, Lutheran, and Reformed theology? [TP: The comma after "Scholastic" is misleading. Dooyeweerd means to refer to both scholastic Lutheran and scholastic Reformed theology. He is not referring to three different kinds of theology.] Was this conception not taken from Greek philosophy, whose pagan religious basic motive was radically opposed to that of Holy Scripture? Did this Roman dualism not fail to evaluate the biblical insight into the religious root and centre of human existence? Was it not, consequently, incompatible with the biblical doctrine concerning the radical character of the fall into sin, which affected human nature in its very root?

How, then, could this unbiblical view of man be maintained? The reason is that the scholastic basic motive of nature and grace of Roman Catholicism continued to influence the theological and philosophical views of the Reformation. This motive introduced a dualism into the entire view of man and the world, which could not fail to withdraw Christian thought from the radical and integral grip of the Word of God.

It is this very dualism which testifies to its unbiblical character. It was the result of the attempt to accommodate

the Greek view of nature to the biblical doctrine of grace. In fact, this scholastic motive of accommodation resulted in a radical deformation of the central theme of the Word-revelation. The scholastic view that created human nature finds its centre in an autonomous human reason cannot be accommodated to the radical biblical view of creation. It implied that in the natural sphere of life man would be independent of the Word of God. This false division of human life into a natural and a supernatural sphere became the starting [page 16] point of the process of secularization, which resulted in the crisis of Western culture, in its spiritual uprooting. In fact, it abandoned the so-called natural sphere to the rule of the apostate religious basic motive, initially to that of Greek thought, later on to that of modern humanism. For human reason is not an independent substance; much rather it is an instrument. The *I* is the hidden player, who avails himself of this instrument. And the central motive that rules both human thought and the human ego itself is of a central religious nature.

The question: "What is man? Who is he?" cannot be answered by man himself. But it has been answered by God's Word-revelation, which uncovers the religious root and centre of human nature in its creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ. Man lost true self-knowledge when he lost the true knowledge of God. But all idols of the human selfhood, which man in his apostasy has devised, break down when they are confronted with the Word of God, which unmask their vanity and nothingness. It is this Word alone, which by its radical grip can bring about a real reformation of our view of man and of our view of the temporal world; and such an inner reformation is the very opposite of the scholastic device of accommodation. [END]