

BREAK OUT AND UNFOLD

CALVIN and DOOYEWEERD

(Part 1)

by Bruce C. Wearne

In my previous article, "Teacher Evaluation II" (Nurture, Spr. 1981), I contrasted the contemporary emphasis upon self-consciousness, based in a supposed human self-sufficiency, with what I believe to be a Christian view of knowledge. Human knowledge is creaturely knowledge, and since God's work of reconciliation in Christ has effected a change of heart at the root of human experience, such knowledge is opened up once again to its true character. All this being so, I am acutely aware that my article will have raised some eyebrows because I therein bracketed the contributions of John Calvin and Herman Dooyeweerd, implying that they both held to a similar view of human knowledge. The current climate of controversy which surrounds our schools, it seems to me, relates in many ways to the disparate perceptions held among us concerning the relationship between the Calvinistic worldview and the philosophy that has become associated with the names of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.

For some, the issue will be quite clear cut. Whilst claiming to be Calvinist, through association with churches of Reformed Confession, they will see any re-articulation of Calvin's perspective

in modern terms to be potentially deviant. Neo-Calvinism is valid for them so long as it is an attempt to restore to us the worldview of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries. But to bring Calvinism together with Dooyeweerd's philosophy (which in its initial phases in the 1920's and 1930's was presented as Calvinistic philosophy) is almost as invalid as trying to marry scriptural reflection with pagan thought. And the issue will have been proved in my quoting Dooyeweerd's insistence that the Delphic maxim, much loved by Socrates, "know thyself", should be inscribed over the doorway of philosophy as its valid goal. What further evidence do we need? Surely such a goal is humanistic? Surely approval of such pagan sentiment is ungodly? However, to draw this conclusion would be very hasty indeed. Dooyeweerd, in referring to Socrates at the very beginning of his discussion of philosophy, is actually following Calvin's example! (See H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, p.5; In the *Twilight of Western Thought*, p.25. Compare with Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II:1:1.)

Erstwhile defenders of Dooyeweerd's system may even find the argument

here a little hard to take. Has not Dooyeweerd gone beyond Calvin by rooting out the last vestiges of nature/grace thinking, inherited in the tradition of Calvinistic scholasticism, and thus prepared the way for the emergence, finally, of a truly Christian system of scientific reflection? What is Dooyeweerd doing here quoting Socrates to back up his view?



John Calvin

Too often supporters and self-appointed critics look upon Dooyeweerd's philosophical contribution as something which he considered to be entirely new. In arguing that God's Word speaks to the heart of all spheres of scientific research because Christ has effected an integral redemption at the root of the human race, Dooyeweerd, as I have read him, is arguing for an ongoing appreciation and renovation of philosophical analysis. Christ is the Lord of all systems of philosophy, Christian and pagan; the Christian philosophic task is reformational in the sense that apostate traditions of philosophical analysis must be broken open so that they can unfold their human creatureliness, creatureliness which must, despite all arrogant and ignorant disbelief, show the Fatherly dominion



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of God through His Son (see, e.g., 2 Corinthians 10:1-6).

In this sense Calvin was right to wrestle with Socrates' view right at the outset of setting forth his view of how God makes Himself known to us. And in this sense also Dooyeweerd should be viewed as following in Calvin's line. The iron grip of pagan thought upon our contemporary scientific research must be broken — but to work at breaking this grip we must do more than merely assert dogmatically that we reject its influence. We must understand its influence from "the inside".

In what has become his controversial discussion of the transcendental critique of theoretical thought, Dooyeweerd wanted no closed fronts as far as contemporary dialogue was concerned. He sought for a method which required exhaustive analysis and critique of the theories of those of differing faith, but such a critique needed to be based upon an inexhaustible love for, and solidarity with, his fellow scientific researchers. Those straightjacketed by the claims of science need to be helped by theoretical word and philosophic deed to see their own human self-insufficiency. Those entrapped in what he called the dogma of the autonomy of theoretical thought require liberation so that they can go about their scientific labour truly. But it is not a liberation in a humanistic revolutionary sense. It is a truly reformational liberation.

We do not demand that the adherents of this dogma abandon it by anticipation. We only ask of them to abstain from the dogmatical assertion that it is a necessary condition of any true philosophy and to subject this assertion to the test of a

transcendental critique of theoretical thought. (In the *Twilight of Western Thought*, p.6).

By transcendental critique, Dooyeweerd meant a systematic investigation of the conditions which make theoretical thought possible. (See also Jacob Klapwijk, "The Struggle for a Christian Philosophy: another look at Dooyeweerd" and "Dooyeweerd's Christian Philosophy: Antithesis and Critique" in *Reformed Journal*, Feb. 1980, March 1980.)



Herman Dooyeweerd

Calvin in the Institutes considers self-consciousness to be a religious activity oriented to God, placing before us, in effect, our need to acknowledge our dependent creatureliness. Dooyeweerd also takes this view and makes it his own. A truly Christian approach in scientific thought will be effected, he says, when in science one can acknowledge, with Calvin, the religious rootage of all knowledge. In so doing he is pointing us to a self-critical appraisal of the current modes of scientific thought. This must have basic implications for teachers and teacher-trainees seeking a Christian science of pedagogy, and it is to this goal that all teachers in our Christian schools must self-critically strive.

The argument put about by some that followers of Dooyeweerd's philosophy are participating in some sort of sinister deviation is perhaps understandable to the degree that "the reformational philosophy" has been too often presented, by friend and foe, as some-

thing entirely new. And one of the big failures in the heat of the ensuing debate is the failure to locate Dooyeweerd's thought in its historical relation to Calvin, Althusius and Kuyper.

I believe that debate in our circles is vital and that heated debate is not always counter-productive. In following articles I want to contribute further to this discussion and develop the points raised here. Dooyeweerd in no way denies the lines of tradition. Christian philosophy, in the words of Al Wolters (see *Ourselves in the Philosophical Tradition*, ICS, Toronto, 1975), must strive to be anti-revolutionary and Christian-historical. I want to explore the tradition in which Dooyeweerd stood and seek to fashion some critical points pertinent to our Christian educational endeavours.

Tradition must be acknowledged. Yet one of the big disorienting problems we face in Australia, 1982, as we seek to develop a distinctly Christian approach to education, is our relative poverty as far as an ongoing national tradition of Christian schooling is concerned. The lack of a cumulative tradition of Christian pedagogical obedience together with the predominant tradition of ongoing Christian indifference should lead us, not to despair, but to a sober analysis of what God calls us to.

We should not try to use, or criticise, Dooyeweerd's philosophy in a slipshod way. And neither should we try pragmatically to circumvent the long drawn-out discussions that will be required if we are to work together for Christ's Name in education. Our Christian cultural poverty cannot be circumvented by developing "Dooyeweerdian" programs in schools, scholarship or teacher education. When we suggest that what we are trying to do, or are proposing to do, is something entirely new, our arguments and actions are no longer located in the line of reformational reflection nor do they contribute reformatively to our current thought and practice.

Bruce C. Wearne

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CALVIN AND DOOYEWEERD

in the struggle for a
Christian Educational perspective
(Part 2)



Calvin in the Institutes considers self-consciousness as a religious activity in which we are reminded of our need to throw the full weight of our confidence upon our Creator and Redeemer. Dooyeweerd, as we argued last time, takes this view and makes it his own. Within theoretical thought, a valid human responsibility, with its own integrity, the Christian way is that of the radical self-critical attitude.

A truly Christian approach in all spheres of science will be effected, says Dooyeweerd, when we acknowledge, in word and deed, the religious basis and the religious direction of all knowledge. The approach of Calvin, and more particularly of his interpreter Dooyeweerd, points the way to an ongoing Christian appraisal of current modes of scientific thought — both Christian and non-Christian.

Christian teachers and teacher trainees, following Calvin and Dooyeweerd, will seek to develop a Christian science of pedagogy — but they will resist the temptation of thinking that their "reformational insight" gives them a license for claiming a new approach. The Calvinist approach to science is rehabilitative, seeking to turn scholarship back to its calling of service. Thus, whatever else a Christian science of pedagogy implies, it must also mean an ongoing appreciation of the twists and turns in contemporary educational thought and practise. The theories which rule the day in teacher training programmes, and which have a considerable influence on the thought patterns of Christian teachers must be understood from the "inside" — thoroughly, conscientiously and critically.

Dooyeweerd's method of theoretical critique not only leads one to discern the religious foundations in the twists and turns of non-Christian thought. His approach implies that there is a Christian calling to be found in the scholarly investigation of the development of the many and varied Christian and non-Christian philosophies. Such research is not to be conceived of as ivory-tower obscurantism but as an important, limited, specialist calling in response to the cultural mandate. But this will only be possible, according to Dooyeweerd, if such scholarly investigation of all currents of philosophy is undertaken in

an attitude of self-criticism. Only then is it possible to thwart that mentality which would try to build Christian theory on non-Christian foundations.

This kind of work has to be done to help teachers discern the influences which have shaped their thinking. Not all teachers have to engage in this specialist work. But Christian teachers will be hindered in their task if they are not helped to develop for themselves the critical insights that this sort of investigation brings forth.

If Christian teachers are not SELF-CRITICALLY analyzing contemporary educational theory, Christian and non-Christian, then they are being UNCRITICAL of traditions which have shaped their own thinking.

No amount of classroom dedication and "reading up" on one's own sub-cultural theories can compensate for this lack of a self-critical attitude. What is also needed is an open self-critical attitude permeating the policies of the Christian school association and an open, trustful and loving approach by school community to its teachers. Too often the spiritual problems faced by Christian teachers, due to their desire to wrestle Christianly with non-Christian perspectives, are not understood by the school authorities to whom the teacher is to give an account.

Many of the existential classroom problems besetting Christian teachers arise because of their wrestling with the perspectives they have had imparted to them in their teacher training courses. Once inside a Christian school, Christian teachers will often note that even within its so-called "Christian" programme the prevailing non-Christian traditions of schooling and education manifest their pervasive power — non-Christian philosophy does not stop short at the Christian school gates. What then is to be done? Even the awareness of this state of affairs has its unsettling side, and a Christian teacher who views things in this light can easily be isolated and alone even among fellow Christians.

In general Christian teachers do not have an alternative Christian theory at their fingertips. Moreover they lack a method for systematically working

through the non-Christian educational perspectives with non-dogmatic integrity. So we arrive at a situation where the critical Christian can easily locate what is wrong. But stating an alternative is not so easy. Consequently, a grave spiritual temptation for many Christian teachers arises — a negativism can easily set in.

How can this negativism be resisted and avoided? At this point I would like to suggest that Dooyeweerd's approach to the scholarly task is of great perspectival and practical importance for the teacher. In encouraging the scholarly investigation of all schools of philosophy and in attempting to develop a Christian philosophy Dooyeweerd points the way to overcoming negativism by a critical attitude that is firstly self-critical. Such an attitude can help to develop a genuine Christian openness to the world around us.

By the grace of God, and only by that grace, educationalists who reject the Word of God still provide valuable insights about the order of creation, the educational task and the processes of learning. But since all of humankind's life is religiously directed to the One True God or an idol, there can be no Christian grounds for attempting to make Christian educational principles compatible with any system of thought which tries to find for itself a foundation outside of Christ's universal dominion. The call to follow Christ is a call to turn from the direction of non-Christian thought. But since understanding is a religious activity oriented to God, in self-surrender or rebellion, there can be no grounds for Christians failing to appreciate non-Christian thought and practice on its own terms. Since Christ is the Lord of all systems of philosophy, Christian and non-Christian, Christian teachers have to learn to appreciate the real strengths and weaknesses of non-Christian educational theories and practice. They cannot afford to confine themselves solely to circles of Christian (or reformed or reformational) educational theory, because they have a task which requires of them the carving of a distinctive Christian approach.

For Christian teachers in Christian schools to embark upon this kind of in-depth examination they will need the time and the patience. Often schools are sorely pressed in their resources in providing basic educational services, let alone releasing staff for study, preparation and in-service training.

There is a battle here which derives from the Christian school's LACK OF POWER in our current situation. And this lack of power is not just a

political matter in terms of state-aid, or the like, it is a profound spiritual issue because it raises the question of whether the Christian school is capable, in the current climate, of challenging the non-Christian educational traditions.

If there is not the time for teachers to give concerted attention to their own theories and the theories of others in the light of a Christian educational perspective can we ever really expect our classroom programmes to move in a spirit of new-found obedience?

For the moment I would like to suggest that the Christ-centred approach of Christian schools should develop an

understanding, in the supporting community, of the underlying difference between schooling which confesses Christ as the Redeemer and schooling which is lost in service to an idol. This will imply that the school contribute to the education of its own supporting community. A school gains its integrity as a community of instruction and learning in a pedagogical programme which is distinct from the tasks Christ has assigned to the family, church, state, commerce and industry. Schooling, subject to Christ and His kingly rule, should unfold in such a way that actively encourages renewed submission, by all members of the school community, to the demands of His

Kingdom in all the aspects of an experience. Thus the school should play its part in helping its community to discern the battle of spirits currently waging war in the educational domain. But let us not forget that the antithesis which God has spoken into our human rebellious existence.

Gen. 3:14-24 is a great blessing. It is in fact a call to repentance implying openness and genuine love — not only for openness among ourselves and fellow Christians, but a call to serve all humankind. (Matthew 5:43-48).

Bruce C Wearne

Calvin and Dooyeweerd III

In the struggle for a christian educational perspective,

Previously I have suggested that christian schools to be christian do not need to develop "Dooyeweerdian" programmes in their curriculæ. But christian schools communities could do well, if they encouraged their teachers and administrators to follow the direction implied by Dooyeweerd's "transcendental critique". They could do this by self-consciously seeking ways of offering the service of critical solidarity in the ~~contingent~~ of public education arena of this land.

But what is this "critical solidarity"? To gain some insight into the openness implied by this, let us return briefly to Klapwijk's evaluation of Dooyeweerd:

If we were to try to express the debt the church and Christendom have to Dooyeweerd, we could say that with his transcendental critique he has rehabilitated the levitical service of solidarity in the courtyard of the temple, that is, in the field of philosophy and science. Dooyeweerd... wanted to offer real help.

In philosophy, Dooyeweerd argued, the christian scholar must seek to truly "get alongside" the non-christian thinker. This is done by entering into the struggles, tensions ~~of non-~~ and vision of non-christian thought. The christian scholar does not so enter to be conquered by non-christian thought, nor in the arrogance that he can conquer the heart of

the unbelieving thinker. The battle is a truly spiritual one to be waged in faith and the aim is to urge the non-christian position to develop truly critical understanding.

All ~~of us~~ involved in the christian school movement in this country have been involved in ~~the~~ the nation's non-christian way of life - this has occurred in the public-legal realm, the media, in the domestic sphere, in ~~our~~ work or in schooling and higher education. And in seeking to criticize the direction of our nation's life in any sphere we must strive to show that our critique is first- and- foremost self-criticism. It is at this point that we must seek to show our solidarity with our non-christian neighbours in the ^{guilt} of our society. And this is where ~~over~~ ^{the cultivation of} a public critical solidarity can allow a christian school system to be truly open and an expression of the self-criticism of christian communities. For it is to be feared that christian schools readily succumb to a temptation that leads in the other direction. Could it be that christian schooling is involved in an attempt to wash our hands of the problems besetting our national educational system? If this is so then our endeavour has not been clothed in the humility of critical solidarity. We've all too easily identified the idols of the state school system but are we capable of casting a critical eye upon ~~our~~ our own hypocrisies? (Matthew 7:1-5)

But parent-controlled christian schools are not going to be able to offer such public and genuine service in this land if they themselves do not become arenas of encouragement for christian teachers to critically study all modes of contemporary educational theory; if they do not seek to develop a truly ecumenical dialogue among christian educators wherever they are (in private, state or denominational or alternative schools) concerning the basis and direction of christian schooling; if they do not seek to critically evaluate contemporary christian educational thought; if they do not seek to make a contribution to public discussion about the structure and direction of the national educational enterprise.

Christian schooling must be schooling, able and willing to stand next to other school systems built on different religious bases. Thus I am suggesting that, following Calvin & Dooyeweerd, christian schools should seek to develop recognizable ongoing forms of solidarity with other schools and systems, in a spirit of willingness to learn and mutual respect.

This is no call to abandon the distinctiveness of christian schooling; much rather it is a call to exhibit an ~~servant~~ attitude of service, seeking to offer genuine educational help in scholarly ways. Moreover let us not think that this can in anyway diminish the great religious division in mankind. But let us realize that the antithesis is ^{also} a call to openness and genuine love.

The christian teacher who would follow in Dooyeweerd's steps would boldly argue that it is a valid christian task to understand the prevailing non-christian educational philosophies which undergird major sectors of contemporary schooling. For understanding a theory and arguing with oneself and one's colleagues over its strengths and weaknesses is a valid human task, an integral dimension of the teacher's responsibility. ~~For such a task is necessary to prom~~

By following Calvin & Dooyeweerd the christian teacher can with boldness, faith and love ~~then~~ proclaim that the Living Christ is Ruler of all systems of educational thought and practice. He is the one to whom also all systems of schooling must give an account for their openness to him and their love for mankind.