

Ottawa
May 11, 1982

Dear K. [name deleted]

So far I have collected materials to make up two packets which may already have reached you. I am in the process of gathering materials for a third. You will see that in maintaining the contemplative/theosophical perspective on Dooyeweerd I receive much helpful and welcome support from the modern social-contextual approach to the History of Science and Ideas with its openness to the consideration of even mystical and Hermetic roots. The central Christian dynamic of this approach is what I have come to understand as Orthodoxy. I am sympathetic to the "paradigm" theory of T.S. Kuhn but in a Dooyeweerdian way: Paradigms, although incommensurable in the sense of being irreducible to each other (*sphere sovereignty*), are also commensurable in the sense that the whole cosmological order is (analogically) reflected in each (*sphere universality, holomorphic property*). Paradigm change is similar to religious conversion because every paradigm (consciously or unconsciously) is rooted in a spirituality ("Life in its entirety is religion.").

Dooyeweerdian philosophy and life-and world-view is not merely one of a number of paradigms, because it is a "paradigm of paradigms," an attempt to disclose the cosmic structure that makes paradigm shifts possible. A highly reflective, contemplative description of universally-valid structural states of affairs, Dooyeweerdian philosophy itself must be structurally understood as "extraordinary science," distinguished from what Kuhn would call "normal science." The Vollenhoven-Toronto Law-Word metaphysics (God-Law-cosmos), on the contrary, is "normal science," circumscribed and limited by ideological and "reflex" commitments to the prevalent Covenant Theology of the Christian Reformed, *gereformeerde*, life-and world-view, i.e. to the Zwingli/Bullinger/Puritan/Westminster legal Covenant Idea which is absolutely alien to Calvin's Calvinism. It is not possible to give an adequate theological, philosophical, or historical account of Dooyeweerd within the restrictive boundaries of this Vollenhoven-Toronto "paradigm" which, regrettably, subscribes to a typical Protestant anti-mystical bias which arose as a reaction to Idealism/Romanticism.

The previous two paragraphs outline an interpretation that has been urging itself upon me more and more as I have searched for source material in answer to your request. With little difficulty at all, I have come across strong evidence supporting last year's intuition that the God-Law[-Word]-cosmos scheme is simply *gereformeerde Covenant* theology which, I would now suggest, is rising up against anything and everything that would disturb the traditional paradigm. Anthony Tol's writings, so typically Christian-Reformed and Covenant-Theological in sentiment, rhetoric, and content, explicitly carry God-Law-Cosmos over into the covenant scheme. Vollenhoven, whom Tol's writings so strongly reflect (I understand that Tol was Vollenhoven's assistant), explicitly places his logical analysis of the interconnections of the Holy Trinity with Creation in the broad perspective of religious response to Covenant. J.A. L. Taljaard does likewise in *Polished Lenses*.¹ Of his explanation that the God-[Law-Word]-creation scheme keeps God from

¹ J.A.L. Taljaard: *Polished Lenses* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Pro Rege Press, 1976).

becoming far removed from his creation (dualistically) or lost in it (monistically), Jim Olthuis wrote to me,

The only way I know at present to avoid these extremes is to relate God to his creation covenantly by means of his Word (Letter of July 18, 1977).

Johan van der Hoeven who, I am fairly sure is a Dooyeweerd supporter (He came with Dooyeweerd to an A.R.S.S. conference years ago), nevertheless suggests that Dooyeweerd's Idea of Law could be explained as *covenant*, but it may be significant that, to his knowledge, Dooyeweerd never suggested this.²

Peter Steen in his hefty Th.D. dissertation, *The Idea of Religious Transcendence in the Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, with Reference to its Significance for Reformed Theology* (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1970)³, enthusiastically claims (pp. 297 n.28, 325) Meredith Kline's idea of law covenant (Kline, *Treaty of the Great King and By Oath Consigned*) as the Biblical key to God-Law-cosmos and the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*. This dissertation is a North-American compendium and extension of the systematic and widespread efforts of many Netherland scholars in the school of Calvinistic philosophy to eradicate the whole central transcendental core and contemplative categories of Dooyeweerd and to replace them with various constructions, in particular with Vollenhoven's God-Law-cosmos scheme. "All law giving is covenantal," writes Steen (p. 225). In a typical fashion of Covenant Theology, the Covenant Idea is hypostatized as the primary intermediary relation between God and Creation. No longer the ontic ground of Creation and Redemption, Christ assumes a parenthetical role as merely covenant agent. The ontic, Creation, continues covenantly on, apart from Christ's mediatorial work which merely restores mankind to the Covenant (pp. 325-238). This hypostatized Covenant Idea is absolutely foreign to Calvin and must be sharply distinguished from Calvin's covenant of Grace. I have commented on this problem of the Zwingly/Bullinger/Puritan/Westminster legal Covenant Idea in my critique of the Beversluis report on Christian educational philosophy, and suggested a solution through the proper application of intentionality.

Dr. Steen's dissertation (xxix +332 pages) is available from University Microfilms International.⁴ It is a very instructive and revealing example of the Vollenhoven-Toronto pattern of Law-Word metaphysics and its roots. Dooyeweerd's (and Kuyper's) "semi-mystical," "supralapsarian" transcendental-contemplative structure comes under full-scale attack as being nature/grace-grace/nature (i.e. scholastic) presumable in line with the standard Protestant anti-mystical conflation of anything mystical with "nature-grace" (Roman Catholicism) and/or paganism. Even Calvin's *sensus deitatis* is labelled as pagan (Steen p. 227 n. 189. See also J.A. L. Taljaard, *Polished Lenses*, p. 158 where Dooyeweerd and Calvin are alleged to be maintaining the Stoic doctrine of the *logoi*

² See van der Hoeven's *Philosophia Reformata* "In Memory of Herman Dooyeweerd: Meaning, Time and Law," (p. 142).

³ The thesis has since been published as Peter J. Steen: *The Structure of Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1983).

⁴ See note 3 above.

spermatikoi). This sort of critique, I would strongly suggest, is simply an example of a widespread Protestant reaction to Romanticism, a reaction which, in this particular case aims to replace Dooyeweerd's "mystical *dunamis*" by the "Zwinglian" rationalism which operates over against Calvin's Calvinism in Christian Reformed/*gereformeerde* circles. Calvin's Calvinism, which is more "catholic" than "reformed," must be suppressed. Note Louis Bouyer's observation that it is because the Reformed churches

...were later to adopt the practical organization put into effect by Calvin that they are persistently and misleadingly called "Calvinist" by Catholics, though they have always called themselves simply "reformed." This is misleading because the "reformed" Churches as a whole, and leaving aside the Presbyterian synodal organization and some minority groups of Scottish and Dutch theologians, have always felt the greatest repugnance for the theological theses that properly belong to Calvinism. It was Zwingli who so excellently expressed the basic mentality of the "reformed" churchmen (even more than their doctrine, which was always fluid) even if we cannot strictly call them his disciples [...] Protestantism itself, and especially "reformed" Protestantism, proceeded from a Christian humanism still steeped in the platonizing Augustinianism and rationalizing Nominalistic scholasticism that had developed at the end of the Middle Ages, and was thus constantly threatened with being overwhelmed by [...] purely secularizing rationalism [...] It was of this humanism and this Protestantism that Zwingli was so characteristic [...] Calvin in many respects went the opposite way. Setting out from the Christian humanism that had broken away from ancient tradition, to be dominated more and more by the Augustinianism and semi-rationalism of the Later Middle Ages, he gradually weaned himself from this tendency so as to come ever closer to fundamentally Catholic humanism. And that was precisely where the "reformed" churchmen refused to follow him.⁵

Bouyer points out that for the anti-mystical Protestant theologians (e.g. Barth, Ebeling, Nygren, Brunner),

...mysticism in Christianity is an essentially Catholic fact, and they would be ready to affirm that it was the element in Catholicism that justified Protestant opposition more than any other. The reason they give is always the same: mysticism is an essentially pagan element in religion, foreign to the Bible and irreconcilable with the Gospel.⁶

See Bouyer's interesting (and very significant for the Reformational movement) approach to this problem of Protestant confusion. In contradistinction to 19th-century liberalizing Protestantism and to the anti-mystical Protestantism (itself "gnostic") which mistakenly

⁵ Louis Bouyer: *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality* (New York: The Seabury Press; originally published Éditions Montaigne 1965, 1969 Burns & Oates London and Declée Co, Inc., New York), pp. 78, 79, 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

read “hellenization” and “gnosticism” back into every Christian expression of the mystical and contemplative even in the Bible, Abraham Kuyper himself (and consequently, Dooyeweerd) was profoundly moved by the spirituality of Anglican-Catholic renewal (the Oxford Movement) through Charlotte M. Yonge’s novel, *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1883). According to Dr. John H. de Vries, translator of Kuyper’s *To be Near Unto God*, *The Heir of Redclyffe* gave Kuyper

...an impression of church life in England such as was almost altogether lacking at the time in the Church in the Netherlands. It brought him in touch with the deep significance of the Sacrament, with the impressive character of liturgical worship, and with what he afterward used to speak of as “The Anointed Prayer Book.”⁷

Dr. Stanley M. Wiersma, professor of English at Calvin College, writes:

Henry Zylstra, former chairman of the department of English at Calvin College and co-founder of the *Reformed Journal*, used to remark in his course in “Victorian Prose” on the similarity between the ideas of Cardinal Newman and Abraham Kuyper. My colleague George Graham Harper, who was not only Zylstra’s student but his colleague, reports that Zylstra confided to him the intuition (none the worse for that, mind you!) that there must have been correspondence between Kuyper and Newman. How else account for the similarities in their ideas?”⁸

Kuyper’s connection with the Oxford Movement and with the Catholic revival through religious Romanticism goes a long way towards explaining the similarities even if there were no correspondence. What I find remarkable is that spirituality of the Oxford Movement type returned Anglicans in the direction of Roman Catholicism, but returned Kuyper and Dooyeweerd back through Calvin’s Calvinism in the direction of Orthodoxy. Written from within the Kuyperian-Dooyeweerdian Reformational Movement, my *Anakainosis* articles are nonetheless a standard, well-known Orthodox critique of “Western” thought, as well as a positive expression of Orthodox life-and world-view.

According to Dr. J. Klapwijk, Vollenhoven expressed a certain sympathy with one of the Orthodox Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, whom he interprets as a follower of an interaction theory originating with the early Greek thought of Anaximenes.⁹ If only Vollenhoven could have seen that in Dooyeweerd, as in

⁷ Abraham Kuyper: *To be Near Unto God*, tr. John H. de Vries, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978, first published 1925 and originally published as *Nabij God te Zijn*, Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1908). See also Frank Vanden Berg: *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography*, (St. Catherines, Ont.” Paideia Press, 1978), chapter 3, “Books and a Book”).

⁸ Stanley M. Wiersma: “Curtmantle and the Philosophy of Law,” *The Reformed Journal* 27 (6) (June, 1977), 6-10.

⁹ J. Klapwijk: “Calvin and Neo-Calvinism on Non-Christian Philosophy,” in *The Idea of a Christian Philosophy. Essays in Honour of D.H.Th. Vollenhoven* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1973; also published in *Philosophia Reformata*), pp. 60-61.

Cappadocian Orthodoxy, the Church's trinitarian contemplation has passed reformatioally into, through, and beyond the mystical gnosticism of Alexandria:

As in the thought of St. Basil, so also with St. Gregory of Nazianzus the intellectualistic or super-intellectualistic mysticism of Alexandria is superseded.¹⁰

Then later,

After centuries of struggle against intellectualistic mysticism we find in the writings of the Byzantine Hesychast, in St. Simeon the New Theologian and in St. Gregory Palamas and his disciples, a vision-contemplation which is again connected with the eschatological vision: the departure out of history toward the eternal light of the 'eighth day.'¹¹

This is not an abandonment of history but its transfiguration in Christ.

When I look over biographic accounts of Vollenhoven's philosophical/theological development and the problems he encountered, I can pick up what may be the hint of an apology—that, in spite of his achievement in the academic world, he never did get some very fundamental problems sorted out—but he was a very pious, devoted Christian man who pushed on in faith. It has occurred to me that the picture presented might well be descriptive of a scholar who has reached the limits of his "paradigm" and is scouting about, trying this way and that, wondering what is the way to go. He came very close to Orthodoxy and the freedom of reflective-synthetic scientific thought but failed to follow his brother-in-law in abandoning the inadequate "paradigm" of the old school of Covenant Theology. He and his followers failed to see that their God-Law-cosmos scheme (Law-Word metaphysics) is itself a form of Protestant scholasticism which forces the juridical imagery of creation almost mechanically into a realm of "supratemporal law." Seeing themselves in the transcendental mirror of the Dooyeweerdian Law-Idea, they have chosen to remain as they are and to do away with the mirror (I Cor. 2:16, James 1:22-25). Failing to heed Calvin's view of Law as a mirror, they allow "ontic Law" to nominalistically split them off from their mystical-spiritual roots in Christ—at least in their thinking, which becomes a rather unwieldy objectification under the Law in the Baconian-Newtonian line. This is the route to secularization which I hope and pray will not overwhelm the Reformational movement.

I look forward to hearing from you and your friends.

Yours truly,
Michael M. Morbey

¹⁰ Vladimir Lossky: *The Vision of God*, tr. from the French by Asheleigh Moorhouse, (Great Britain: The Faith Press, 1963, 1973), p. 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.